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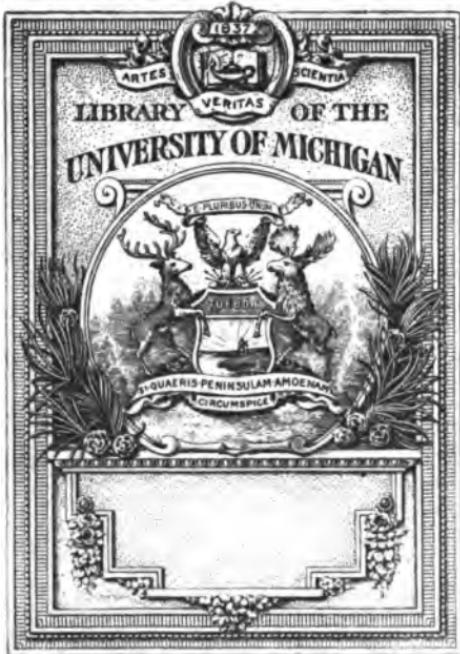
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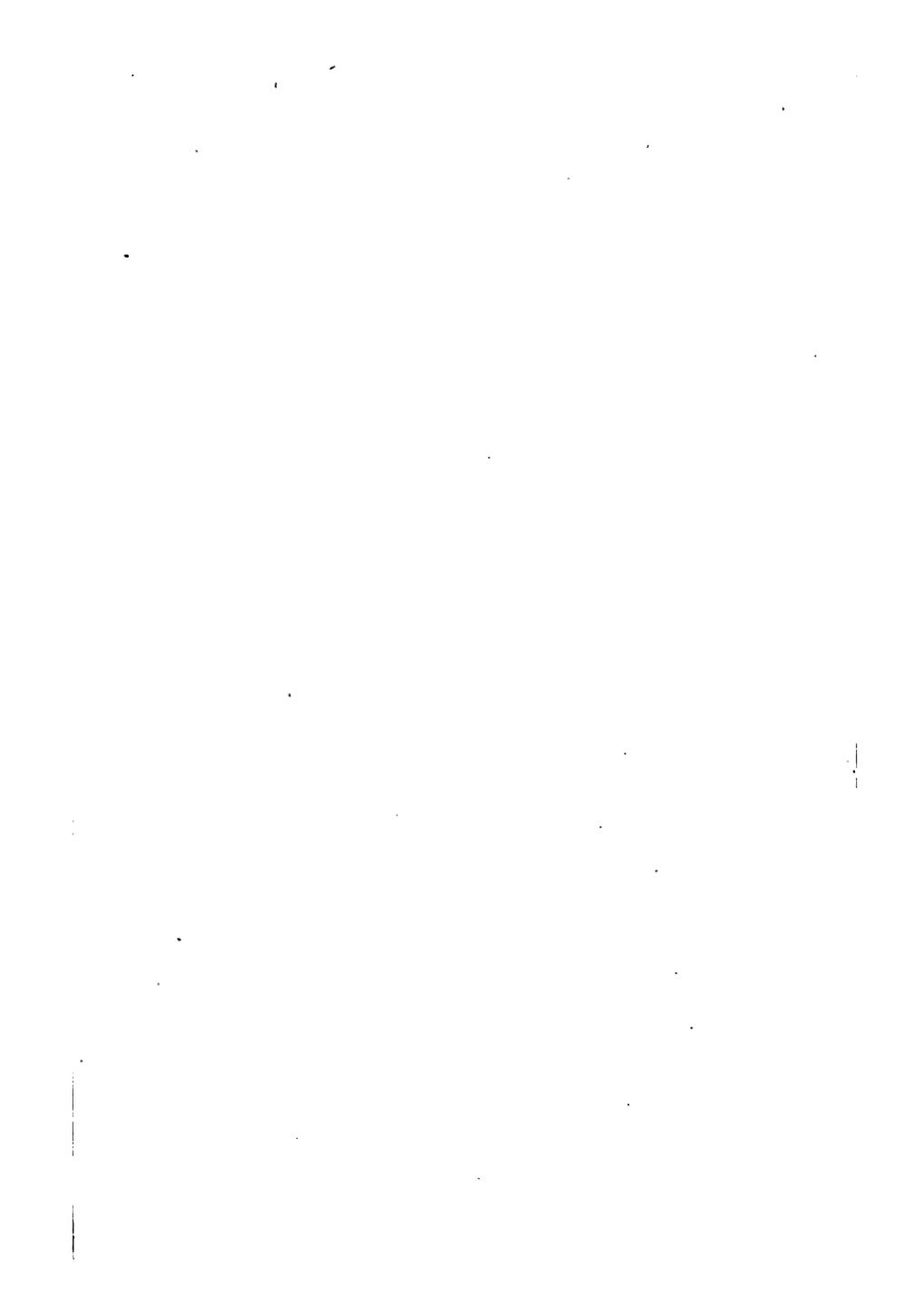
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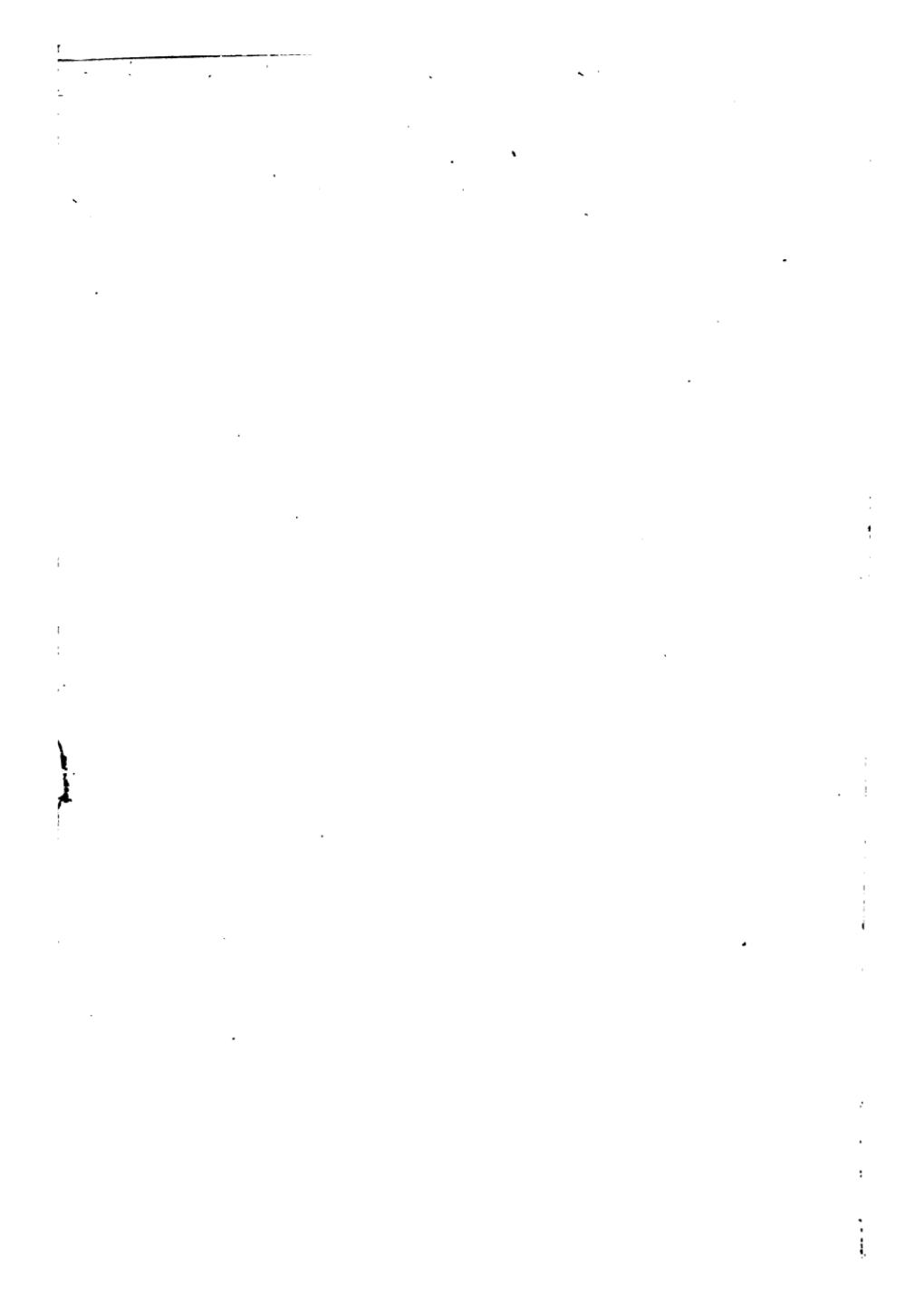


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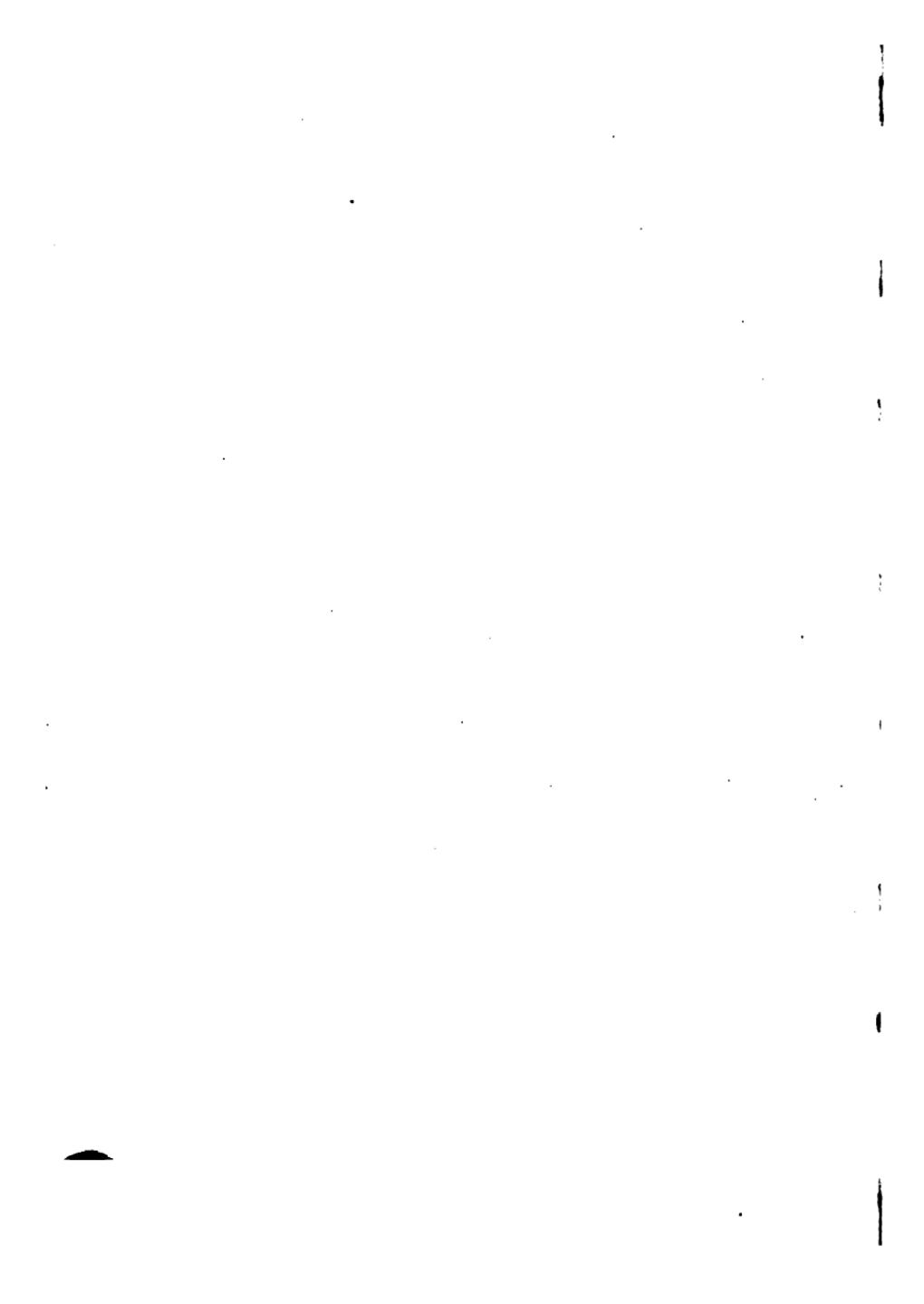
ORLEY FARM

BY

ANTHONY TROLLOPE

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ORLEY FARM

CHAPTER I

WHAT TOOK PLACE IN HARLEY STREET

"TOM, I've come back again," said Mrs. Furnival, as soon as the dining-room door was closed behind her back.

"I'm very glad to see you; I am indeed," said he, getting up and putting out his hand to her. "But I really never knew why you went away."

"Oh yes, you know. I'm sure you know why I went. But—"

"I'll be shot if I did then."

"I went away because I did not like Lady Mason going to your chambers."

"Psha!"

"Yes; I know I was wrong, Tom. That is I was wrong—about that."

"Of course you were, Kitty."

"Well; don't I say I was? And I've come back again, and I beg your pardon;—that is, about the lady."

"Very well. Then there's an end of it."

"But Tom; you know I've been provoked. Haven't I now? How often have you been home to dinner since you have been member of parliament for that place?"

"I shall be more at home now, Kitty."

"Shall you indeed? Then I'll not say another word to vex you. What on earth can I want, Tom, except just that you should sit at home with me sometimes on

evenings, as you used to do always in the old days? And as for Martha Biggs——”

“Is she come back too?”

“Oh dear no. She’s in Red Lion Square. And I’m sure, Tom, I never had her here except when you wouldn’t dine at home. I wonder whether you know how lonely it is to sit down to dinner all by oneself!”

“Why; I do it every other day of my life. And I never think of sending for Martha Biggs; I promise you that.”

“She isn’t very nice, I know,” said Mrs. Furnival—“that is, for gentlemen.”

“I should say not,” said Mr. Furnival. Then the reconciliation had been affected, and Mrs. Furnival went up stairs to prepare for dinner, knowing that her husband would be present, and that Martha Biggs would not. And just as she was taking her accustomed place at the head of the table, almost ashamed to look up lest she should catch Spooner’s eye who was standing behind his master, Rachel went off in a cab to Orange Street, commissioned to pay what might be due for the lodgings, to bring back her mistress’s boxes, and to convey the necessary tidings to Miss Biggs.

“Well, I never!” said Martha, as she listened to Rachel’s story.

“And they are quite loving, I can assure you,” said Rachel.

“It’ll never last,” said Miss Biggs triumphantly—“never. It’s been done too sudden to last.”

“So I’ll say good-night if you please, Miss Biggs,” said Rachel, who was in a hurry to get back to Harley Street.

“I think she might have come here before she went there; especially as it wasn’t anything out of her way.

She couldn't have gone shorter than Bloomsbury Square, and Russell Square, and over Tottenham Court Road."

"Missus didn't think of that, I dare say."

"She used to know the way about these parts well enough. But give her my love, Rachel." Then Martha Biggs was again alone, and she sighed deeply.

It was well that Mrs. Furnival came back so quickly to her own house, as it saved the scandal of any domestic quarrel before her daughter. On the following day Sophia returned, and as harmony was at that time reigning in Harley Street, there was no necessity that she should be presumed to know anything of what had occurred. That she did know—know exactly what her mother had done, and why she had done it, and how she had come back, leaving Martha Biggs dumbfounded by her return, is very probable, for Sophia Furnival was a clever girl, and one who professed to understand the ins and outs of her own family—and perhaps of some other families. But she behaved very prettily to her papa and mamma on the occasion, never dropping a word which could lead either of them to suppose that she had interrogated Rachel, been confidential with the housemaid, conversed on the subject—even with Spooner, and made a morning call on Martha Biggs herself.

There arose not unnaturally some conversation between the mother and daughter as to Lady Mason;—not as to Lady Mason's visits to Lincoln's Inn and their impropriety as formerly presumed;—not at all as to that; but in respect to her present lamentable position and that engagement which had for a time existed between her and Sir Peregrine Orme. On this latter subject Mrs. Furnival had of course heard nothing

during her interview with Mrs. Orme at Noningsby. At that time Lady Mason had formed the sole subject of conversation; but in explaining to Mrs. Furnival that there certainly could be no unhallowed feeling between her husband and the lady, Mrs. Orme had not thought it necessary to allude to Sir Peregrine's past intentions. Mrs. Furnival, however, had heard the whole matter discussed in the railway carriage, had since interrogated her husband—learning, however, not very much from him—and now inquired into all the details from her daughter.

"And she and Sir Peregrine were really to be married?" Mrs. Furnival, as she asked the question, thought with confusion of her own unjust accusations against the poor woman. Under such circumstances as those Lady Mason must of course have been innocent as touching Mr. Furnival.

"Yes," said Sophia. "There is no doubt whatsoever that they were engaged. Sir Peregrine told Lady Staveley so himself."

"And now it's all broken off again?"

"Oh, yes; it is all broken off now. I believe the fact to be this. Lord Alston, who lives near Noningsby, is a very old friend of Sir Peregrine's. When he heard of it he went to The Cleeve—I know that for certain;—and I think he talked Sir Peregrine out of it."

"But, my conscience, Sophia—after he had made her the offer!"

"I fancy that Mrs. Orme arranged it all. Whether Lord Alston saw her or not I don't know. My belief is that Lady Mason behaved very well all through, though they say very bitter things against her at Noningsby."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Furnival, the feelings of

whose heart were quite changed as regarded Lady Mason.

"I never knew a woman so badly treated." Sophia had her own reasons for wishing to make the best of Lady Mason's case. "And for myself I do not see why Sir Peregrine should not have married her if he pleased."

"He is rather old, my dear."

"People don't think so much about that nowadays as they used. If he liked it, and she too, who had a right to say anything? My idea is that a man with any spirit would have turned Lord Alston out of the house. What business had he to interfere?"

"But about the trial, Sophia?"

"That will go on. There's no doubt about that. But they all say that it's the most unjust thing in the world, and that she must be proved innocent. I heard the judge say so myself."

"But why are they allowed to try her then?"

"Oh, papa will tell you that."

"I never like to bother your papa about law business." Particularly not, Mrs. Furnival, when he has a pretty woman for his client!

"My wonder is that she should make herself so unhappy about it," continued Sophia. "It seems that she is quite broken down."

"But won't she have to go and sit in the court—with all the people staring at her?"

"That won't kill her," said Sophia, who felt that she herself would not perish under any such process. "If I was sure that I was in the right, I think that I could hold up my head against all that. But they say that she is crushed to the earth."

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Furnival. "I wish that I

could do anything for her." And in this way they talked the matter over very comfortably.

Two or three days after this Sophia Furnival was sitting alone in the drawing-room in Harley Street, when Spooner answered a double knock at the door, and Lucius Mason was shown up stairs. Mrs. Furnival had gone to make her peace in Red Lion Square, and there may perhaps be ground for supposing that Lucius had cause to expect that Miss Furnival might be seen at this hour without interruption. Be that as it may, she was found alone, and he was permitted to declare his purpose unmolested by father, mother, or family friends.

"You remember how we parted at Noningsby," said he, when their first greetings were well over.

"Oh, yes; I remember it very well. I do not easily forget words such as were spoken then."

"You said that you would never turn away from me."

"Nor will I;—that is with reference to the matter as to which we were speaking."

"Is our friendship then to be confined to one subject?"

"By no means. Friendship cannot be so confined, Mr. Mason. Friendship between true friends must extend to all the affairs of life. What I meant to say was this—But I am quite sure that you understand me without any explanation."

He did understand her. She meant to say that she had promised to him her sympathy and friendship, but nothing more. But then he had asked for nothing more. The matter of doubt within his own heart was this. Should he or should he not ask for more; and if he resolved on answering this question in the affirma-

tive, should he ask for it now? He had determined that morning that he would come to some fixed purpose on this matter before he reached Harley Street. As he crossed out of Oxford Street from the omnibus he had determined that the present was no time for love-making;—walking up Regent Street, he had told himself that if he had one faithful heart to bear him company he could bear his troubles better;—as he made his way along the north side of Cavendish Square he pictured to himself what would be the wound to his pride if he were rejected;—and in passing the ten or twelve houses which intervened in Harley Street between the corner of the square and the abode of his mistress, he told himself that the question must be answered by circumstances.

“Yes, I understand you,” he said. “And believe me in this—I would not for worlds encroach on your kindness. I knew that when I pressed your hand that night, I pressed the hand of a friend—and nothing more.”

“Quite so,” said Sophia. Sophia’s wit was usually ready enough, but at that moment she could not resolve with what words she might make the most appropriate reply to her—friend. What she did say was rather lame, but it was not dangerous.

“Since that I have suffered a great deal,” said Lucius. “Of course you know that my mother has been staying at The Cleeve?”

“Oh yes. I believe she left it only a day or two since.”

“And you heard perhaps of her—— I hardly know how to tell you, if you have not heard it.”

“If you mean about Sir Peregrine, I have heard of that.”

"Of course you have. All the world has heard of it." And Lucius Mason got up and walked about the room holding his hand to his brow. "All the world is talking about it. Miss Furnival, you have never known what it is to blush for a parent."

Miss Furnival at the moment felt a sincere hope that Mr. Mason might never hear of Mrs. Furnival's visit to the neighbourhood of Orange Street and of the causes which led to it, and by no means thought it necessary to ask for her friend's sympathy on that subject.

"No," said she, "I never have; nor need you do so for yours. Why should not Lady Mason have married Sir Peregrine Orme if they both thought such a marriage fitting?"

"What; at such a time as this; with these dreadful accusations running in her ears? Surely this was no time for marrying! And what has come of it? People now say that he has rejected her and sent her away."

"Oh no. They cannot say that."

"But they do. It is reported that Sir Peregrine has sent her away because he thinks her to be guilty. That I do not believe. No honest man, no gentleman, could think her guilty. But is it not dreadful that such things should be said?"

"Will not the trial take place very shortly now? When that is once over all these troubles will be at an end."

"Miss Furnival, I sometimes think that my mother will hardly have strength to sustain the trial. She is so depressed that I almost fear her mind will give way; and the worst of it is that I am altogether unable to comfort her."

"Surely that at present should specially be your task."

"I cannot do it. What should I say to her? I think that she is wrong in what she is doing; thoroughly, absolutely wrong. She has got about her a parcel of lawyers. I beg your pardon, Miss Furnival, but you know I do not mean such as your father."

"But has not he advised it?"

"If so I cannot but think he is wrong. They are the very scum of the gaols; men who live by rescuing felons from the punishment they deserve. What can my mother require of such services as theirs? It is they that frighten her and make her dread all manner of evils. Why should a woman who knows herself to be good and just fear anything that the law can do to her?"

"I can easily understand that such a position as hers must be very dreadful. You must not be hard upon her, Mr. Mason, because she is not as strong as you might be."

"Hard upon her! Ah, Miss Furnival, you do not know me. If she would only accept my love I would wait upon her as a mother does upon her infant. No labour would be too much for me; no care would be too close. But her desire is that this affair should never be mentioned between us. We are living now in the same house, and though I see that this is killing her yet I may not speak of it." Then he got up from his chair, and as he walked about the room he took his handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his eyes.

"I wish I could comfort you," said she. And in saying so she spoke the truth. By nature she was not tender hearted, but now she did sympathise with him.

By nature, too, she was not given to any deep affection, but she did feel some spark of love for Lucius Mason. "I wish I could comfort you." And as she spoke she also got up from her chair.

"And you can," said he, suddenly stopping himself and coming close to her. "You can comfort me—in some degree. You and you only can do so. I know this is no time for declarations of love. Were it not that we are already so much to each other, I would not indulge myself at such a moment with such a wish. But I have no one whom I can love; and—and it is very hard to bear." And then he stood, waiting for her answer, as though he conceived that he had offered her his hand.

But Miss Furnival well knew that she had received no offer. "If my warmest sympathy can be of service to you——"

"It is your love I want," he said, taking her hand as he spoke. "Your love, so that I may look on you as my wife;—your acceptance of my love, so that we may be all in all to each other. There is my hand. I stand before you now as sad a man as there is in all London. But there is my hand—will you take it and give yours in pledge of your love?"

I should be unjust to Lucius Mason were I to omit to say that he played his part with a becoming air. Unhappiness and a melancholy mood suited him perhaps better than the world's ordinary good-humour. He was a man who looked his best when under a cloud, and shone the brightest when everything about him was dark. And Sophia also was not unequal to the occasion. There was, however, this difference between them. Lucius was quite honest in all that he said and did upon the occasion; whereas Miss Furnival was only

half honest. Perhaps she was not capable of a higher pitch of honesty than that.

"There is my hand," said she; and they stood holding each other, palm to palm.

"And with it your heart?" said Lucius.

"And with it my heart," answered Sophia. Nor as she spoke did she hesitate for a moment, or become embarrassed, or lose her command of feature. Had Augustus Staveley gone through the same ceremony at Noningsby in the same way I am inclined to think that she would have made the same answer. Had neither done so, she would not on that account have been unhappy. What a blessed woman would Lady Staveley have been had she known what was being done in Harley Street at this moment!

In some short rhapsody of love it may be presumed that Lucius indulged himself when he found that the affair which he had in hand had so far satisfactorily arranged itself. But he was in truth too wretched at heart for any true enjoyment of the delights of a favoured suitor. They were soon engaged again on that terrible subject, seated side by side indeed and somewhat close, but the tone of their voices and their very words were hardly different from what they might have been had no troth been plighted between them.

His present plan was that Sophia should visit Orley Farm for a time, and take that place of dear and bosom friend which a woman circumstanced as was his mother must so urgently need. We, my readers, know well who was now that loving friend, and we know also which was best fitted for such a task, Sophia Furnival or Mrs. Orme. But we have had, I trust, better means of reading the characters of those ladies than had

fallen to the lot of Lucius Mason, and should not be angry with him because his eyes were dark.

Sophia hesitated a moment before she answered this proposition—not as though she were slack in her love, or begrudged her services to his mother; but it behoved her to look carefully at the circumstances before she would pledge herself to such an arrangement as that. If she went to Orley Farm on such a mission would it not be necessary to tell her father and mother—nay, to tell all the world that she was engaged to Lucius Mason; and would it be wise to make such a communication at the present moment? Lucius said a word to her of going into court with his mother, and sitting with her, hand in hand, while that ordeal was passing by. In the publicity of such sympathy there was something that suited the bearings of Miss Furnival's mind. The idea that Lady Mason was guilty had never entered her head, and therefore, on this she thought there could be no disgrace in such a proceeding. But nevertheless—might it not be prudent to wait till that trial were over?

"If you are my wife you must be her daughter; and how can you better take a daughter's part?" pleaded Lucius.

"No, no; and I would do it with my whole heart. But, Lucius, does she know me well enough? It is of her that we must think. After all that you have told me, can we think that she would wish me to be there?"

It was his desire that his mother should learn to have such a wish, and this he explained to her. He himself could do but little at home because he could not yield his opinion on those matters of importance as to which he and his mother differed so vitally; but if she had a woman with her in the house—such a woman as his

own Sophia—then he thought her heart would be softened and part of her sorrow might be assuaged.

Sophia at last said that she would think about it. It would be improper, she said, to pledge herself to anything rashly. It might be that as her father was to defend Lady Mason, he might on that account object to his daughter being in the court. Lucius declared that this would be unreasonable—unless indeed Mr. Furnival should object to his daughter's engagement. And might he not do so? Sophia thought it very probable that he might. It would make no difference in her, she said. Her engagement would be equally binding—as permanently binding, let who would object to it. And as she made this declaration there was of course a little love scene. But, for the present, it might be best that in this matter she should obey her father. And then she pointed out how fatal it might be to avert her father from the cause while the trial was still pending. Upon the whole she acted her part very prudently, and when Lucius left her she was pledged to nothing but that one simple fact of a marriage engagement.

CHAPTER II

HOW SIR PEREGRINE DID BUSINESS WITH MR. ROUND

IN the mean time Sir Peregrine was sitting at home trying to determine in what way he should act under the present emergency, actuated as he was on one side by friendship and on the other by duty. For the first day or two—nay for the first week after the confession had been made to him—he had been so astounded, had been so knocked to the earth, and had remained in such a state of bewilderment, that it had been impossible for him to form for himself any line of conduct. His only counsellor had been Mrs. Orme; and, though he could not analyse the matter, he felt that her woman's ideas of honour and honesty were in some way different from his ideas as a man. To her the sorrows and utter misery of Lady Mason seemed of greater weight than her guilt. At least such was the impression which her words left. Mrs. Orme's chief anxiety in the matter still was that Lady Mason should be acquitted; —as strongly so now as when they both believed her to be as guiltless as themselves. But Sir Peregrine could not look at it in this light. He did not say that he wished that she might be found guilty;—nor did he wish it. But he did announce his opinion to his daughter-in-law that the ends of justice would so be best promoted, and that if the matter were driven to a trial it would not be for the honour of the court that a false verdict should be given. Nor would he believe that such a false verdict could be obtained. An English

judge and an English jury were to him the Palladium of discerning truth. In an English court of law such a matter could not remain dark;—nor ought it, let whatever misery betide. It was strange how that old man should have lived so near the world for seventy years, should have taken his place in parliament and on the bench, should have rubbed his shoulders so constantly against those of his neighbours, and yet have retained so strong a reliance on the purity of the world in general. Here and there such a man may still be found, but the number is becoming very few.

As for the property, that must of necessity be abandoned. Lady Mason had signified her agreement to this; and therefore he was so far willing that she should be saved from further outward punishment, if that were still possible. His plan was this; and to his thinking it was the only plan that was feasible. Let the estate be at once given up to the proper owner—even now, before the day of trial should come; and then let them trust, not to Joseph Mason, but to Joseph Mason's advisers to abstain from prosecuting the offender. Even this course he knew to be surrounded by a thousand difficulties; but it might be possible. Of Mr. Round, old Mr. Round, he had heard a good report. He was a kind man, and even in this very matter had behaved in a way that had shamed his client. Might it not be possible that Mr. Round would engage to drop the prosecution if the immediate return of the property were secured? But to effect this must he not tell Mr. Round of the woman's guilt? And could he manage it himself? Must he not tell Mr. Furnival? And by so doing, would he not rob Lady Mason of her sole remaining tower of strength?—for if Mr. Furnival

knew that she was guilty, Mr. Furnival must of course abandon her cause. And then Sir Peregrine did not know how to turn himself, as he thus argued the matter within his own bosom.

And then too his own disgrace sat very heavy on him. Whether or no the law might pronounce Lady Mason to have been guilty, all the world would know her guilt. When that property should be abandoned, and her wretched son turned out to earn his bread, it would be well understood that she had been guilty. And this was the woman, this midnight forger, whom he had taken to his bosom, and asked to be his wife! He had asked her, and she had consented, and then he had proclaimed the triumph of his love to all the world. When he stood there holding her to his breast he had been proud of her affection. When Lord Alston had come to him with his caution he had scorned his old friend and almost driven him from his door. When his grandson had spoken a word, not to him but to another, he had been full of wrath. He had let it be known widely that he would feel no shame in showing her to the world as Lady Orme. And now she was a forger, and a perjurer, and a thief;—a thief who for long years had lived on the proceeds of her dexterous theft. And yet was he not under a deep obligation to her—under the very deepest? Had she not saved him from a worse disgrace;—saved him at the cost of all that was left to herself? Was he not still bound to stand by her? And did he not still love her?

Poor Sir Peregrine! May we not say that it would have been well for him if the world and all its trouble could have now been ended so that he might have done with it?

Mrs. Orme was his only counsellor, and though she

could not be brought to agree with him in all his feelings, yet she was of infinite comfort to him. Had she not shared with him this terrible secret his mind would have given way beneath the burden. On the day after Lady Mason's departure from The Cleeve, he sat for an hour in the library considering what he would do, and then he sent for his daughter-in-law. If it behoved him to take any step to stay the trial, he must take it at once. The matter had been pressed on by each side, and now the days might be counted up to that day on which the judges would arrive in Alston. That trial would be very terrible to him in every way. He had promised, during those pleasant hours of his love and sympathy in which he had felt no doubt as to his friend's acquittal, that he would stand by her when she was arraigned. That was now impossible, and though he had not dared to mention it to Lady Mason, he knew that she would not expect that he should do so. But to Mrs. Orme he had spoken on the matter, and she had declared her purpose of taking the place, which it would not now become him to fill! Sir Peregrine had started from his chair when she had so spoken. What! his daughter! She, the purest of the pure, to whom the very air of a court of law would be a contamination;—she, whose whiteness had never been sullied by contact with the world's dust; she sit by the side of that terrible criminal, hand in hand with her, present to all the world as her bosom friend. There had been but few words between them on the matter; but Sir Peregrine had felt strongly that that might not be permitted. Far better than that it would be that he should humble his grey hairs and sit there to be gazed at by the crowd. But on all accounts how much was it to be desired that there should be no trial!

"Sit down, Edith," he said, as with her soft step she came up to him. "I find that the assizes will be here, in Alston, at the end of next month."

"So soon as that, father?"

"Yes; look here: the judges will come in on the 25th of March."

"Ah me—that is very sudden. But, father, will it not be best for her that it should be over?"

Mrs. Orme still thought, had always thought, that the trial itself was unavoidable. Indeed she had thought and she did think that it afforded to Lady Mason the only possible means of escape. Her mind on the subject, if it could have been analysed, would probably have been this. As to the property, that question must for the present stand in abeyance. It is quite right that it should go to its detestable owners,—that it should be made over to them at some day not very distant. But for the present, the trial for that old, long-distant crime was the subject for them to consider. Could it be wrong to wish for an acquittal for the sinner,—an acquittal before this world's bar, seeing that a true verdict had undoubtedly been given before another bar? Mrs. Orme trusted that no jury would convict her friend. Let Lady Mason go through that ordeal; and then, when the law had declared her innocent, let restitution be made.

"It will be very terrible to all if she be condemned," said Sir Peregrine.

"Very terrible! Mr. Furnival——"

"Edith, if it comes to that, she will be condemned. Mr. Furnival is a lawyer and will not say so; but from his countenance, when he speaks of her, I know that he expects it!"

"Oh, father, do not say so."

"But if it is so—— My love, what is the purport of these courts of law if it be not to discover the truth, and make it plain to the light of day?" Poor Sir Peregrine! His innocence in this respect was perhaps beautiful, but it was very simple. Mr. Aram, could he have been induced to speak out his mind plainly, would have expressed, probably, a different opinion.

"But she escaped before," said Mrs. Orme, who was clearly at present on the same side with Mr. Aram.

"Yes; she did;—by perjury, Edith. And now the penalty of that further crime awaits her. There was an old poet who said that the wicked man rarely escapes at last. I believe in my heart that he spoke the truth."

"Father, that old poet knew nothing of our faith."

Sir Peregrine could not stop to explain, even if he knew how to do so, that the old poet spoke of punishment in this world, whereas the faith on which his daughter relied is efficacious for pardon beyond the grave. It would be much, ay, in one sense everything, if Lady Mason could be brought to repent of the sin she had committed; but no such repentance would stay the bitterness of Joseph Mason or of Samuel Dockwrath. If the property were at once restored, then repentance might commence. If the property were at once restored, then the trial might be stayed. It might be possible that Mr. Round might so act. He felt all this, but he could not argue on it. "I think my dear," he said, "that I had better see Mr. Round."

"But you will not tell him?" said Mrs. Orme, sharply.

"No; I am not authorised to do that."

"But he will entice it from you! He is a lawyer,

and he will wind anything out from a plain, chivalrous man of truth and honour."

"My dear, Mr. Round I believe is a good man."

"But if he asks you the question, what will you say?"

"I will tell him to ask me no such question."

"Oh, father, be careful. For her sake be careful. How is it that you know the truth;—or that I know it? She told it here because in that way only could she save you from that marriage. Father, she has sacrificed herself for—for us."

Sir Peregrine when this was said to him got up from his chair and walked away to the window. He was not angry with her that she so spoke to him. Nay; he acknowledged inwardly the truth of her words, and loved her for her constancy. But nevertheless they were very bitter. How had it come to pass that he was thus indebted to so deep a criminal? What had he done for her but good?

"Do not go from me," she said, following him. "Do not think me unkind."

"No, no, no," he answered, striving almost ineffectually to repress a sob. "You are not unkind."

For two days after that not a word was spoken between them on the subject, and then he did go to Mr. Round. Not a word on the subject was spoken between Sir Peregrine and Mrs. Orme; but she was twice at Orley Farm during the time, and told Lady Mason of the steps which her father-in-law was taking.

"He won't betray me!" Lady Mason had said. Mrs. Orme had answered this with what best assurance she could give; but in her heart of hearts she feared that Sir Peregrine would betray the secret.

It was not a pleasant journey for Sir Peregrine. Indeed it may be said that no journeys could any longer be pleasant for him. He was old and worn and feeble; very much older and much more worn than he had been at the period spoken of in the commencement of this story, though but a few months had passed over his head since that time. For him now it would have been preferable to remain in the arm-chair by the fireside in his own library, receiving such comfort in his old age as might come to him from the affection of his daughter-in-law and grandson. But he thought that it behoved him to do this work; and therefore, old and feeble as he was, he set himself to his task. He reached the station in London, had himself driven to Bedford Row in a cab, and soon found himself in the presence of Mr. Round.

There was much ceremonial talk between them before Sir Peregrine could bring himself to declare the purport which had brought him there. Mr. Round of course protested that he was very sorry for all this affair. The case was not in his hands personally. He had hoped many years since that the matter was closed. His client, Mr. Mason of Groby Park, had insisted that it should be reopened; and now he, Mr. Round, really hardly knew what to say about it.

"But, Mr. Round, do you think it is quite impossible that the trial should even now be abandoned?" asked Sir Peregrine very carefully.

"Well, I fear it is. Mason thinks that the property is his, and is determined to make another struggle for it. I am imputing nothing wrong to the lady. I really am not in a position to have any opinion of my own——"

"No, no, no; I understand. Of course your firm is

bound to do the best it can for its client. But Mr. Round;—I know I am quite safe with you.”

“ Well! safe in one way I hope you are. But, Sir Peregrine, you must of course remember that I am the attorney for the other side,—for the side to which you are opposed.”

“ But still;—all that you can want is your client’s interest.”

“ Of course we desire to serve his interests.”

“ And with that view, Mr. Round, is it not possible that we might come to some compromise?”

“ What;—by giving up part of the property?”

“ By giving up all the property,” said Sir Peregrine, with considerable emphasis.

“ Whew—w—w.” Mr. Round at the moment made no other answer than this, which terminated in a low whistle.

“ Better that, at once, than that she should die broken-hearted,” said Sir Peregrine.

There was then silence between them for a minute or two, after which Mr. Round, turning himself round in his chair so as to face his visitor more fully, spoke as follows. “ I told you just now, Sir Peregrine, that I was Mr. Mason’s attorney, and I must now tell you, that as regards this interview between you and me, I will not hold myself as being in that position. What you have said shall be as though it had not been said; and as I am not, myself, taking any part in the proceedings, this may with absolute strictness be the case. But——”

“ If I have said anything that I ought not to have said——” began Sir Peregrine.

“ Allow me for one moment,” continued Mr. Round. “ The fault is mine, if there be a fault, as I should have

explained to you that the matter could hardly be discussed with propriety between us."

"Mr. Round, I offer you my apology from the bottom of my heart."

"No, Sir Peregrine. You shall offer me no apology, nor will I accept any. I know no words strong enough to convey to you my esteem and respect for your character."

"Sir!"

"But I will ask you to listen to me for a moment. If any compromise be contemplated, it should be arranged by the advice of Mr. Furnival and of Mr. Chaffanbrass, and the terms should be settled between Mr. Aram and my son. But I cannot myself say that I see any possibility of such a result. It is not however for me to advise. If on that matter you wish for advice, I think that you had better see Mr. Furnival."

"Ah!" said Sir Peregrine, telling more and more of the story by every utterance he made.

"And now it only remains for me to assure you once more that the words which have been spoken in this room shall be as though they had not been spoken." And then Mr. Round made it very clear that there was nothing more to be said between them on the subject of Lady Mason. Sir Peregrine repeated his apology, collected his hat and gloves, and with slow step made his way down to his cab, while Mr. Round absolutely waited upon him till he saw him seated within the vehicle.

"So Mat. is right after all," said the old attorney to himself as he stood alone with his back to his own fire, thrusting his hands into his trousers-pockets. "So Mat. is right after all!" The meaning of this exclamation will be plain to my readers. Mat. had declared to

his father his conviction that Lady Mason had forged the codicil in question, and the father was now also convinced that she had done so. "Unfortunate woman!" he said; "poor, wretched woman!" And then he began to calculate what might yet be her chances of escape. On the whole he thought that she would escape. "Twenty years of possession," he said to himself; "and so excellent a character!" But nevertheless, he repeated to himself over and over again that she was a wretched, miserable woman.

We may say that all the persons most concerned were convinced, or nearly convinced, of Lady Mason's guilt. Among her own friends Mr. Furnival had no doubt of it, and Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Aram but very little; whereas Sir Peregrine and Mrs. Orme of course had none. On the other side Mr. Mason and Mr. Dockwrath were both fully sure of the truth, and the two Rounds, father and son, were quite of the same mind. And yet, except with Dockwrath and Sir Peregrine, the most honest and the most dishonest of the lot, the opinion was that she would escape. There were five lawyers concerned, not one of whom gave to the course of justice credit that it would ascertain the truth, and not one of whom wished that the truth should be ascertained. Surely had they been honest-minded in their profession they would all have so wished;—have so wished, or else have abstained from all professional intercourse in the matter. I cannot understand how any gentleman can be willing to use his intellect for the propagation of untruth, and to be paid for so using it. As to Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Solomon Aram,—to them the escape of a criminal under their auspices would of course be a matter of triumph. To such work for many years had they

'applied their sharp intellects and legal knowledge. But of Mr. Furnival;—what shall we say of him?

Sir Peregrine went home very sad at heart, and crept silently back into his own library. In the evening, when he was alone with Mrs. Orme, he spoke one word to her. "Edith," he said, "I have seen Mr. Round. We can do nothing for her there."

"I feared not," said she.

"No; we can do nothing for her there."

After that Sir Peregrine took no step in the matter. What step could he take? But he sat over his fire in his library, day after day, thinking over it all, and waiting till those terrible assizes should have come.

CHAPTER III

THE LOVES AND HOPES OF ALBERT FITZALLEN

FELIX GRAHAM, when he left poor Mary Snow, did not go on immediately to the doctor's shop. He had made up his mind that Mary Snow should never be his wife, and therefore considered it wise to lose no time in making such arrangements as might be necessary both for his release and for hers. But, nevertheless, he had not the heart to go about the work the moment that he left her. He passed by the apothecary's, and looking in saw a young man working sedulously at a pestle. If Albert Fitzallen were fit to be her husband and willing to be so, poor as he was himself, he would still make some pecuniary sacrifice by which he might quiet his own conscience and make Mary's marriage possible. He still had a sum of £1,200 belonging to him, that being all his remaining capital; and the half of that he would give to Mary as her dower. So in two days he returned, and again looking at the doctor's shop, again saw the young man at his work.

"Yes, Sir, my name is Albert Fitzallen," said the medical aspirant, coming round the counter. There was no one else in the shop, and Felix hardly knew how to accost him on so momentous a subject, while he was still in charge of all that store of medicine, and liable to be called away at any moment to relieve the ailments of Clapham. Albert Fitzallen was a pale-faced, light-haired youth, with an incipient moustache,

with his hair parted in equal divisions over his forehead, with elaborate shirt-cuffs elaborately turned back, and with a white apron tied round him so that he might pursue his vocation without injury to his nether garments. His face, however, was not bad, nor mean, and had there not been about him a little air of pretension, assumed perhaps to carry off the combined apron and beard, Felix would have regarded him altogether with favourable eyes.

"Is it in the medical way?" asked Fitzallen, when Graham suggested that he should step out with him for a few minutes. Graham explained that it was not in the medical way,—that it was in a way altogether of a private nature; and then the young man, pulling off his apron and wiping his hands on a thoroughly medicated towel, invoked the master of the establishment from an inner room, and in a few minutes Mary Snow's two lovers were walking together, side by side along the causeway.

"I believe you know Miss Snow," said Felix, rushing at once into the middle of all those delicate circumstances.

Albert Fitzallen drew himself up, and declared that he had that honour.

"I also know, her," said Felix. "My name is Felix Graham——"

"Oh, Sir, very well," said Albert. The street in which they were standing was desolate, and the young man was able to assume a look of decided hostility without encountering any other eyes than those of his rival. "If you have anything to say to me, Sir, I am quite prepared to listen to you—to listen to you, and to answer you. I have heard your name mentioned by Miss Snow." And Albert Fitzallen stood his ground

as though he were at once going to cover himself with his pistol arm.

"Yes, I know you have. Mary has told me what has passed between you. You may regard me, Mr. Fitzallen as Mary's best and surest friend."

"I know you have been a friend to her; I am aware of that. But, Mr. Graham, if you will allow me to say so, friendship is one thing, and the warm love of a devoted bosom is another."

"Quite so," said Felix.

"A woman's heart is a treasure not to be bought by an effort of friendship," said Fitzallen.

"I fully agree with you there," said Graham.

"Far be it from me to make any boast," continued the other, "or even to hint that I have gained a place in that lady's affections. I know my own position too well, and say proudly that I am existing only on hope." Here, to show his pride, he hit himself with his closed fist on his shirt-front. "But, Mr. Graham, I am free to declare, even in your presence, though you may be her best and surest friend,"—and there was not wanting, from the tone of his voice, a strong flavour of scorn as he repeated these words—"that I do exist on hope, let your claims be what they will. If you desire to make such hope on my part a cause of quarrel, I have nothing to say against it." And then he twirled all that he could twirl of that incipient moustache.

"By no means," said Graham.

"Oh, very well," said Fitzallen. "Then we understand that the arena of love is open to us both. I do not fail to appreciate the immense advantages which you enjoy in this struggle." And then Fitzallen looked up into Graham's ugly face and thought of his own appearance in the looking-glass.

"What I want to know is this," said Felix. "If you marry Mary Snow, what means have you of maintaining her? Would your mother receive her into her house? I presume you are not a partner in that shop; but would it be possible to get you in as a partner, supposing Mary were to marry you and had a little money as her fortune?"

"Eh?" said Albert, dropping his look of pride, allowing his hand to fall from his lips, and standing still before his companion with his mouth wide open.

"Of course you mean honestly by dear Mary?"

"Oh, Sir, yes, on the honour of a gentleman. My intentions, Sir, are— Mr. Graham, I love that young lady with a devotion of heart, that—that—that— Then you don't mean to marry her yourself; eh, Mr. Graham?"

"No, Mr. Fitzallen, I do not. And now, if you will so far confide in me, we will talk over your prospects."

"Oh, very well. I'm sure you are very kind. But Miss Snow did tell me—"

"Yes, I know she did, and she was quite right. But as you said just now, a woman's heart cannot be bought by friendship. I have not been a bad friend to Mary, but I had no right to expect that I could win her love in that way. Whether or no you may be able to succeed, I will not say, but I have abandoned the pursuit." In all which Graham intended to be exceedingly honest, but was, in truth, rather hypocritical.

"Then the course is open to me?" said Fitzallen.

"Yes, the course is open," answered Graham.

"But the race has still to be run. Don't you think that Miss Snow is of her nature very—very cold?"

Felix remembered the one kiss beneath the lamp-post—the one kiss given and received. He remembered

also that Mary's acquaintance with the gentleman must necessarily have been short; and he made no answer to this question. But he made a comparison. What would Madeline have said and done had he attempted such an iniquity? And he thought of her flashing eyes and terrible scorn, of the utter indignation of all the Staveley family, and of the wretched abyss into which the offender would have fallen.

He brought back the subject at once to the young man's means, to his mother, and to the doctor's shop; and though he learned nothing that was very promising, neither did he learn anything that was the reverse. Albert Fitzallen did not ride a very high horse when he learned that his supposed rival was so anxious to assist him. He was quite willing to be guided by Graham, and, in that matter of the proposed partnership, was sure that old Balsam, the owner of the business, would be glad to take a sum of money down. "He has a son of his own," said Albert, "but he don't take to it at all. He's gone into wine and spirits; but he don't sell half as much as he drinks."

Felix then proposed that he should call on Mrs. Fitzallen, and to this Albert gave a blushing consent. "Mother has heard of it," said Albert, "but I don't exactly know how." Perhaps Mrs. Fitzallen was as attentive as Mrs. Thomas had been to stray documents packed away in odd places. "And I suppose I may call on—on—Mary?" asked the lover, as Graham took his leave. But Felix could give no authority for this, and explained that Mrs. Thomas might be found to be a dragon still guarding the Hesperides. Would it not be better to wait till Mary's father had been informed? and then, if all things went well, he might prosecute the affair in due form and as an acknowledged lover.

All this was very nice, and as it was quite unexpected, Fitzallen could not but regard himself as a fortunate young man. He had never contemplated the possibility of Mary Snow being an heiress. And when his mother had spoken to him of the hopelessness of his passion, had suggested that he might perhaps marry his Mary in five or six years. Now the dearest wish of his heart was brought close within his reach, and he must have been a happy man. But yet, though this certainly was so, nevertheless, there was a feeling of coldness about his love, and almost of disappointment as he again took his place behind the counter. The sorrows of Lydia in the play when she finds that her passion meets with general approbation are very absurd, but, nevertheless, are quite true to nature. Lovers would be great losers if the path of love were always to run smooth. Under such a dispensation, indeed, there would probably be no lovers. The matter would be too tame. Albert did not probably bethink himself of a becoming disguise, as did Lydia—of an amiable ladder of ropes, of a conscious moon, or a Scotch parson; but he did feel, in some undefined manner, that the romance of his life had been taken away from him. Five minutes under a lamp-post with Mary Snow was sweeter to him than the promise of a whole bevy of evenings spent in the same society, with all the comforts of his mother's drawing-room around him. Ah, yes, dear readers—my male readers of course I mean—were not those minutes under the lamp-post always very pleasant?

But Graham encountered none of this feeling when he discussed the same subject with Albert's mother. She was sufficiently alive to the material view of the matter, and knew how much of a man's married

happiness depends on his supplies of bread and butter. Six hundred pounds! Mr. Graham was very kind—very kind indeed. She hadn't a word to say against Mary Snow. She had seen her, and thought her very pretty and modest-looking. Albert was certainly warmly attached to the young lady. Of that she was quite certain. And she would say this of Albert—that a better-disposed young man did not exist anywhere. He came home quite regular to his meals, and spent ten hours a day behind the counter in Mr. Balsam's shop—ten hours a day, Sundays included, which Mrs. Fitzallen regarded as a great drawback to the medical line—as should I also, most undoubtedly. But six hundred pounds would make a great difference. Mrs. Fitzallen little doubted but that sum would tempt Mr. Balsam into partnership, or perhaps the five hundred, leaving one hundred for furniture. In such a case Albert would spend his Sundays at home, of course. After that, so much having been settled, Felix Graham got into an omnibus and took himself back to his own chambers.

So far was so good. This idea of a model wife had already become a very expensive idea, and in winding it up to its natural conclusion poor Graham was willing to spend almost every shilling that he could call his own. But there was still another difficulty in his way. What would Snow pere say? Snow pere was, he knew, a man with whom dealings would be more difficult than with Albert Fitzallen. And then seeing that he had already promised to give his remaining possessions to Albert Fitzallen, with what could he bribe Snow pere to abandon that natural ambition to have a barrister for his son-in-law? In these days, too, Snow pere had derogated even from the position in

which Graham had first known him, and had become but little better than a drunken, begging impostor. What a father-in-law to have had! And then Felix Graham thought of Judge Staveley.

He sent, however, to the engraver, and the man was not long in obeying the summons. In latter days Graham had not seen him frequently, having bestowed his alms through Mary, and was shocked at the unmistakable evidence of the gin-shop which the man's appearance and voice betrayed. How dreadful to the sight are those watery eyes; that red, uneven, pimpled nose; those fallen cheeks; and that hanging, slobbered mouth! Look at the uncombed hair, the beard half-shorn, the weak, impotent gait of the man, and the tattered raiment, all eloquent of gin! You would fain hold your nose when he comes nigh you, he carries with him so foul an evidence of his only and hourly indulgence. You would do so, had you not still a respect for his feelings, which he himself has entirely forgotten to maintain. How terrible is that absolute loss of all personal dignity which the drunkard is obliged to undergo! And then his voice! Every tone has been formed by gin, and tells of the havoc which the compound has made within his throat. I do not know whether such a man as this is not the vilest thing which grovels on God's earth. There are women whom we affect to scorn with the full power of our contempt; but I doubt whether any woman sinks to a depth so low as that. She also may be a drunkard, and as such may more nearly move our pity and affect our hearts, but I do not think she ever becomes so nauseous a thing as the man that has abandoned all hopes of life for gin. You can still touch her;—ay, and if the task be in one's way, can touch her gently, striving

to bring her back to decency. But the other! Well, one should be willing to touch him too, to make that attempt of bringing back upon him also. I can only say that the task is both nauseous and unpromising. Look at him as he stands there before the foul, reeking, sloppy bar, with the glass in his hand, which he has just emptied. See the grimace with which he puts it down, as though the dram had been almost too unpalatable. It is the last touch of hypocrisy with which he attempts to cover the offence;—as though he were to say, “I do it for my stomach’s sake; but you know how I abhor it.” Then he sulks sullenly away, speaking a word to no one—shuffling with his feet, shaking himself in his foul rags, pressing himself into a heap—as though striving to drive the warmth of the spirit into his extremities! And there he stands lounging at the corner of the street, till his short patience is exhausted, and he returns with his last penny for the other glass. When that has been swallowed the policeman is his guardian.

Reader, such as you and I have come to that, when abandoned by the respect which a man owes to himself. May God in his mercy watch over us and protect us both!

Such a man was Snow pere as he stood before Graham in his chambers in the Temple. He could not ask him to sit down, so he himself stood up as he talked to him. At first the man was civil, twirling his old hat about, and shifting from one foot to the other;—very civil, and also somewhat timid, for he knew that he was half drunk at the moment. But when he began to ascertain what was Graham’s object in sending for him, and to understand that the gentleman before him did not propose to himself the honour of being his son-

in-law, then his civility left him, and, drunk as he was, he spoke out his mind with sufficient freedom.

"You mean to say, Mr. Graham,"—and under the effect of gin he turned the name into Gorm—"that you are going to throw that young girl over?"

"I mean to say no such thing. I shall do for her all that is in my power. And if that is not as much as she deserves, it will, at any rate, be more than you deserve for her."

"And you won't marry her?"

"No; I shall not marry her. Nor does she wish it. I trust that she will be engaged, with my full approbation——"

"And what the deuce, Sir, is your full approbation to me? Whose child is she, I should like to know? Look here, Mr. Gorm; perhaps you forget that you wrote me this letter when I allowed you to have the charge of that young girl?" And he took out from his breast a very greasy pocket-book, and displayed to Felix his own much-worn letter—holding it, however, at a distance, so that it should not be torn from his hands by any sudden raid. "Do you think, Sir, that I would have given up my child if I didn't know she was to be married respectable? My child is as dear to me as another man's."

"I hope she is. And you are a very lucky fellow to have her so well provided for. I've told you all I've got to say, and now you may go."

"Mr. Gorm!"

"I've nothing more to say; and if I had, I would not say it to you now. Your child shall be taken care of."

"That's what I call pretty cool on the part of any gen'leman. And you're to break your word—a regular

breach of promise, and nothing aint to come of it! I'll tell you what, Mr. Gorm, you'll find that something will come of it. What do you think I took this letter for?"

" You took it, I hope, for Mary's protection."

" And by —— she shall be protected."

" She shall, undoubtedly; but I fear not by you. For the present I will protect her; and I hope that soon a husband will do so who will love her. Now, Mr. Snow, I have told you all I've got to say, and I must trouble you to leave me."

Nevertheless there were many more words between them before Graham could find himself alone in his chambers. Though Snow pere might be a thought tipsy —a sheet or so in the wind, as folks say, he was not more tipsy than was customary with him, and knew pretty well what he was about. " And what am I to do with myself, Mr. Gorm? " he asked in a snivelling voice, when the idea began to strike him that it might perhaps be held by the courts of law, that his intended son-in-law was doing well by his daughter.

" Work," said Graham, turning upon him sharply and almost fiercely.

" That's all very well. It's very well to say 'Work!'"

" You will find it well to do it, too. Work, and don't drink. You hardly think, I suppose, that if I had married your daughter I should have found myself obliged to support you in idleness? "

" It would have been a great comfort in my old age to have had a daughter's house to go to," said Snow, naively, and now reduced to lachrymose distress.

But when he found that Felix would do nothing for him; that he would not on the present occasion lend

him a sovereign, or even half a crown, he again became indignant and paternal, and in this state of mind was turned out of the room.

"Heaven and earth!" said Felix to himself, clenching his hands and striking the table with both of them at the same moment. That was the man with whom he had proposed to link himself in the closest ties of family connection. Albert Fitzallen did not know Mr. Snow; but it might be a question whether it would not be Graham's duty to introduce them to each other.

CHAPTER IV

MISS STAVELEY DECLINES TO EAT MINCED VEAL

THE house at Noningsby was now very quiet. All the visitors had gone, including even the Arbuthnots. Felix Graham and Sophia Furnival, that terrible pair of guests, had relieved Mrs. Staveley of their presence; but, alas! the mischief they had done remained behind them. The house was very quiet, for Augustus and the judge were up in town during the greater part of the week, and Madeline and her mother were alone. The judge was to come back to Noningsby but once before he commenced the circuit which was to terminate at Alston; and it seemed to be acknowledged now on all sides that nothing more of importance was to be done or said in that locality until after Lady Mason's trial.

It may be imagined that poor Madeline was not very happy. Felix had gone away, having made no sign, and she knew that her mother rejoiced that he had so gone. She never accused her mother of cruelty, even within her own heart. She seemed to realise to herself the assurance that a marriage with the man she loved was a happiness which she had no right to expect. She knew that her father was rich. She was aware that in all probability her own fortune would be considerable. She was quite sure that Felix Graham was clever and fit to make his way through the world. And yet she did not think it hard that she should be separated from

him. She acknowledged from the very first that he was not the sort of man whom she ought to have loved, and therefore she was prepared to submit.

It was, no doubt, the fact that Felix Graham had never whispered to her a word of love, and that therefore, on that ground, she had no excuse for hope. But, had that been all, she would not have despaired. Had that been all, she might have doubted, but her doubt would have been strongly mingled with the sweetness of hope. He had never whispered a syllable of love, but she had heard the tone of his voice as she spoke a word to him at his chamber door; she had seen his eyes as they fell on her when he was lifted into the carriage; she had felt the tremor of his touch on that evening when she walked up to him across the drawing-room and shook hands with him. Such a girl as Madeline Staveley does not analyse her feelings on such a matter, and then draw her conclusions. But a conclusion is drawn; the mind does receive an impression; and the conclusion and impression are as though they had been reached by the aid of logical reasoning. Had the match been such as her mother would have approved, she would have had a hope as to Felix Graham's love—strong enough for happiness.

As it was, there was no use in hoping; and therefore she resolved—having gone through much logical reasoning on this head—that by her all ideas of love must be abandoned. As regarded herself, she must be content to rest by her mother's side as a flower ungathered. That she could marry no man without the approval of her father and mother was a thing to her quite certain; but it was, at any rate, as certain that she could marry no man without her own approval. Felix Graham was beyond her reach. That verdict she herself

pronounced, and to it she submitted. But Peregrine Orme was still more distant from her;—Peregrine Orme, or any other of the curled darlings who might come that way playing the part of a suitor. She knew what she owed to her mother, but she also knew her own privileges.

There was nothing said on the subject between the mother and child during three days. Lady Staveley was more than ordinarily affectionate to her daughter, and in that way made known the thoughts which were oppressing her; but she did so in no other way. All this Madeline understood, and thanked her mother with the sweetest smiles and the most constant companionship. Nor was she, even now, absolutely unhappy, or wretchedly miserable; as under such circumstances would be the case with many girls. She knew all that she was prepared to abandon, but she understood also how much remained to her. Her life was her own, and with her life the energy to use it. Her soul was free. And her heart, though burdened with love, could endure its load without sinking. Let him go forth on his career. She would remain in the shade, and be contented while she watched it.

So strictly wise and philosophically serene had Madeline become within a few days of Graham's departure, that she snubbed poor Mrs. Baker, when that good-natured and sharp-witted housekeeper said a word or two in praise of her late patient.

"We are very lonely, aint we, Miss, without Mr. Graham to look after?" said Mrs. Baker.

"I'm sure we are all very glad that he has so far recovered as to be able to be moved."

"That's in course,—though I still say that he went before he ought. He was such a nice gentleman.

Where there's one better, there's twenty worse; and as full of cleverness as an egg is full of meat." In answer to which Madeline said nothing.

"At any rate, Miss Madeline, you ought to say a word for him," continued Mrs. Baker; "for he used to worship the sound of your voice. I've known him lay there and listen, listen, listen for your very footfall."

"How can you talk such stuff, Mrs. Baker? You have never known anything of the kind—and even if he had how could you know it? You should not talk such nonsense to me, and I beg you won't again." Then she went away, and began to read a paper about sick people, written by Florence Nightingale.

But it was by no means Lady Staveley's desire that her daughter should take to the Florence Nightingale line of life. The charities of Noningsby were done on a large scale, in a quiet, handsome, methodical manner, and were regarded by the mistress of the mansion as a very material part of her life's duty; but she would have been driven distracted had she been told that a daughter of hers was about to devote herself exclusively to charity. Her ideas of general religion were the same. Morning and evening prayers, church twice on Sundays, attendance at the Lord's table at any rate once a month, were to herself—and in her estimation for her own family—essentials of life.

And they had on her their practical effects. She was not given to backbiting—though, when stirred by any motive near to her own belongings, she would say an ill-natured word or two. She was mild and forbearing to her inferiors. Her hand was open to the poor. She was devoted to her husband and her

children. In no respect was she self-seeking or self-indulgent. But, nevertheless, she appreciated thoroughly the comforts of a good income—for herself and for her children. She liked to see nice-dressed and nice-mannered people about her, preferring those whose fathers and mothers were nice before them. She liked to go about in her own carriage, comfortably. She liked the feeling that her husband was a judge, and that he and she were therefore above other lawyers and other lawyers' wives. She would not like to have seen Mrs. Furnival walk out of a room before her, nor perhaps to see Sophia Furnival when married take precedence of her own married daughter. She liked to live in a large place like Noningsby, and preferred country society to that of the neighbouring town.

It will be said that I have drawn an impossible character, and depicted a woman who serves both God and Mammon. To this accusation I will not plead, but will ask my accusers whether in their life's travail they have met no such ladies as Lady Staveley?

But such as she was, whether good or bad, she had no desire whatever that her daughter should withdraw herself from the world, and give up to sick women what was meant for mankind. Her idea of a woman's duties comprehended the birth, bringing up, education, and settlement in life of children, also due attendance upon a husband, with a close regard to his special taste in cookery. There was her granddaughter Marian. She was already thinking what sort of a wife she would make, and what commencements of education would best fit her to be a good mother. It is hardly too much to say that Marian's future children were already a subject of care to her. Such being her

disposition, it was by no means matter of joy to her when she found that Madeline was laying out for herself little ways of life, tending in some slight degree to the monastic. Nothing was said about it, but she fancied that Madeline had doffed a ribbon or two in her usual evening attire. That she read during certain fixed hours in the morning was very manifest. As to that daily afternoon service at four o'clock—she had very often attended that, and it was hardly worthy of remark that she now went to it every day. But there seemed at this time to be a monotonous regularity about her visits to the poor, which told to Lady Staveley's mind—she hardly knew what tale. She herself visited the poor, seeing some of them almost daily. If it was foul weather they came to her, and if it was fair weather she went to them. But Madeline, without saying a word to anyone, had adopted a plan of going out exactly at the same hour and with exactly the same object, in all sorts of weather. All this made Lady Staveley uneasy; and then by way of counterpoise, she talked of balls, and offered Madeline *carte blanche* as to a new dress for that special one which would grace the assizes. "I don't think I shall go," said Madeline; and thus Lady Staveley became really unhappy. Would not Felix Graham be better than no son-in-law? When some one had once very strongly praised Florence Nightingale in Lady Staveley's presence, she had stoutly declared her opinion that it was a young woman's duty to get married. For myself I am inclined to agree with her. Then came the second Friday after Graham's departure, and Lady Staveley observed, as she and her daughter sat at dinner alone, that Madeline would eat nothing but potatoes and sea-kale.

"My dear, you will be ill if you don't eat some meat."

"Oh no, I shall not," and Madeline with her prettiest smile.

"But you always used to like minced veal."

"So I do, but I won't have any to-day, mamma, thank you."

Then Lady Staveley resolved that she would tell the judge that Felix Graham, bad as he might be, might come there if he pleased. Even Felix Graham would be better than no son-in-law at all.

On the following day, the Saturday, the judge came down with Augustus, to spend his last Sunday at home before the beginning of his circuit, and some little conversation respecting Felix Graham did take place between him and his wife.

"If they are both really fond of each other, they had better marry," said the judge, curtly.

"But it is terrible to think of their having no income," said his wife.

"We must get them an income. You'll find that Graham will fall on his legs at last."

"He's a very long time before he begins to use them," said Lady Staveley. "And then you know The Cleeve is such a nice property, and Mr. Orme is—"

"But, my love, it seems that she does not like Mr. Orme."

"No, she doesn't," said the poor mother in a tone of voice that was very lachrymose. "But if she would only wait she might like him,—might she not now? He is such a very handsome young man."

"If you ask me, I don't think his beauty will do it."

"I don't suppose she cares for that sort of thing,"

said Lady Staveley, almost crying. "But I'm sure of this, if she were to go and make a nun of herself, it would break my heart,—it would, indeed. I should never hold up my head again."

What could Lady Staveley's idea have been of the sorrows of some other mothers, whose daughters throw themselves away after a different fashion?

After lunch on Sunday the judge asked his daughter to walk with him, and on that occasion the second church service was abandoned. She got on her bonnet and gloves, her walking-boots and winter shawl, and putting her arm happily and comfortably within his, started for what she knew would be a long walk.

"We'll get as far as the bottom of Cleeve Hill," said the judge.

Now the bottom of Cleeve Hill, by the path across the fields and the common, was five miles from Noningsby.

"Oh, as for that, I'll walk to the top if you like," said Madeline.

"If you do, my dear, you'll have to go up alone," said the judge. And so they started.

There was a crisp, sharp enjoyment attached to a long walk with her father which Madeline always loved, and on the present occasion she was willing to be very happy; but as she started, with her arm beneath his, she feared she knew not what. She had a secret, and her father might touch upon it; she had a sore, though it was not an unwholesome festering sore, and her father might probe the wound. There was, therefore, the slightest shade of hypocrisy in the alacrity with which she prepared herself, and in the pleasant tone of her voice as she walked down the avenue towards the gate.

But by the time that they had gone a mile, when their feet had left the road and were pressing the grassy field-path, there was no longer any hypocrisy in her happiness. Madeline believed that no human being could talk as did her father, and on this occasion he came out with his freshest thoughts and his brightest wit. Nor did he, by any means, have the talk all to himself. The delight of Judge Staveley's conversation consisted chiefly in that—that though he might bring on to the carpet all the wit and all the information going, he rarely uttered much beyond his own share of words. And now they talked of pictures and politics—of the new gallery that was not to be built at Charing Cross, and the great onslaught which was not to end in the dismissal of Ministers. And then they got to books—to novels, new poetry, magazines, essays, and reviews; and with the slightest touch of pleasant sarcasm the judge passed sentence on the latest efforts of his literary contemporaries. And thus at last they settled down on a certain paper which had lately appeared in a certain quarterly—a paper on a grave subject, which had been much discussed—and the judge on a sudden stayed his hand, and spared his raillery. "You have not heard, I suppose, who wrote that?" said he. No; Madeline had not heard. She would much like to know. When young people begin their world of reading there is nothing so pleasant to them as knowing the little secrets of literature; who wrote this and that, of which folk are then talking;—who manages this periodical, and puts the salt and pepper into those reviews. The judge always knew these events of the inner literary world, and would communicate them freely to Madeline as they walked.

No; there was no longer the slightest touch of hypocrisy in her pleasant manner and eager voice as she answered, "No, papa, I have not heard. Was it Mr. So-and-so?" and she named an ephemeral literary giant of the day. "No," said the judge, "it was not So-and-so; but you might guess, as you know the gentleman." Then the slightest shade of hypocrisy came upon her again in a moment. "She couldn't guess," she said; "she didn't know." But as she thus spoke the tone of her voice was altered. "That article," said the judge, "was written by Felix Graham. It is uncommonly clever, and yet there are a great many people who abuse it."

And now all conversation was stopped. Poor Madeline, who had been so ready with her questions, so eager with her answers, so communicative and so inquiring, was stricken dumb on the instant. She had ceased for some time to lean upon his arm, and therefore he could not feel her hand tremble; and he was too generous and too kind to look into her face; but he knew that he had touched the fibres of her heart, and that all her presence of mind had for the moment fled from her. Of course such was the case, and of course he knew it. Had he not brought her out there, that they might be alone together when he subjected her to the violence of this shower-bath?

"Yes," he continued, "that was written by our friend Graham. Do you remember, Madeline, the conversation which you and I had about him in the library some time since?"

"Yes," she said, "she remembered it."

"And so do I," said the judge, "and have thought much about it since. A very clever fellow is Felix Graham. There can be no doubt of that."

"Is he?" said Madeline.

I am inclined to think that the judge also had lost something of his presence of mind, or at least, of his usual power of conversation. He had brought his daughter out there with the express purpose of saying to her a special word or two; he had beat very wide about the bush with the view of mentioning a certain name; and now that his daughter was there, and the name had been mentioned, it seemed that he hardly knew how to proceed.

"Yes, he is clever enough," repeated the judge, "clever enough; and of high principles and an honest purpose. The fault which people find with him is this,—that he is not practical. He won't take the world as he finds it. If he can mend it, well and good; we all ought to do something to mend it; but while we are mending it we must live in it."

"Yes, we must live in it," said Madeline, who hardly knew at the moment whether it would be better to live or die in it. Had her father remarked that they must all take wings and fly to heaven, she would have assented.

Then the judge walked on a few paces in silence, bethinking himself that he might as well speak out at once the words which he had to say. "Madeline, my darling," said he, "have you the courage to tell me openly what you think of Felix Graham?"

"What I think of him, papa?"

"Yes, my child. It may be that you are in some difficulty at this moment, and that I can help you. It may be that your heart is sadder than it would be if you knew all my thoughts and wishes respecting you, and all your mother's. I have never had many secrets from my children, Madeline, and I should be pleased

now if you could see into my mind and know all my thoughts and wishes as they regard you."

"Dear papa!"

"To see you happy—you and Augustus and Isabella—that is now our happiness; not to see you rich or great. High position and a plentiful income are great blessings in this world, so that they be achieved without a stain. But even in this world they are not the greatest blessings. There are things much sweeter than them." As he said this, Madeline did not attempt to answer him, but she put her arm once more within his, and clung to his side.

"Money and rank are only good, if every step by which they are gained be good also. I should never blush to see my girl the wife of a poor man whom she loved; but I should be stricken to the core of my heart if I knew that she had become the wife of a rich man whom she did not love."

"Papa!" she said, clinging to him. She had meant to assure him that that sorrow should never be his, but she could not get beyond the one word.

"If you love this man, let him come," said the judge, carried by his feelings somewhat beyond the point to which he had intended to go. "I know no harm of him. I know nothing but good of him. If you are sure of your own heart, let it be so. He shall be to me as another son,—to me and to your mother. Tell me, Madeline, shall it be so?"

She was sure enough of her own heart; but how was she to be sure of that other heart? "It shall be so," said her father. But a man could not be turned into a lover and a husband because she and her father agreed to desire it; not even if her mother would join in that wish. She had confessed to her mother that she loved

this man, and the confession had been repeated to her father. But she had never expressed even a hope that she was loved in return. "But he has never spoken to me, papa," she said, whispering the words ever so softly lest the winds should carry them.

"No; I know he has never spoken to you," said the judge. "He told me so himself. I like him the better for that."

So then there had been other communications made besides that which she had made to her mother. Mr. Graham had spoken to her father, and had spoken to him about her. In what way had he done this, and how had he spoken? What had been his object, and when had it been done? Had she been indiscreet, and allowed him to read her secret? And then a horrid thought came across her mind. Was he to come there and offer her his hand because he pitied and was sorry for her? The Friday fastings and the evening church and the sick visits would be better far than that. She could not however muster courage to ask her father any question as to that interview between him and Mr. Graham.

"Well, my love," he said, "I know it is impertinent to ask a young lady to speak on such a subject; but fathers are impertinent. Be frank with me. I have told you what I think, and your mamma agrees with me. Young Mr. Orme would have been her favourite——"

"Oh, papa, that is impossible."

"So I perceive, my dear, and therefore we will say no more about it. I only mention his name because I want you to understand that you may speak to your mamma quite openly on the subject. He is a fine young fellow, is Peregrine Orme."

"I'm sure he is, papa."

"But that is no reason you should marry him if you don't like him."

"I could never like him,—in that way."

"Very well my dear. There is an end of that, and I'm sorry for him. I think that if I had been a young man at The Cleeve, I should have done just the same. And now let us decide this important question. When Master Graham's ribs, arms, and collar bones are a little stronger, shall we ask him to come back to Noningsby?"

"If you please, papa."

"Very well, we'll have him here for the assize week. Poor fellow, he'll have a hard job of work on hand just then, and won't have much time for philandering. With Chaffanbrass to watch him on his own side, and Leatherham on the other, I don't envy him his position. I almost think I should keep my arm in the sling till the assizes were over, by way of exciting a little pity."

"Is Mr. Graham going to defend Lady Mason?"

"To help to do so, my dear."

"But, papa, she is innocent; don't you feel sure of that?"

The judge was not quite so sure as he had been once. However, he said nothing of his doubts to Madeline. "Mr. Graham's task on that account will only be the more trying, if it becomes difficult to establish her innocence."

"Poor lady!" said Madeline. "You won't be the judge; will you, papa?"

"No; certainly not. I would have preferred to have gone any other circuit than to have presided in a case affecting so near a neighbour, and I may almost say a friend. Baron Maltby will sit in that court."

"And will Mr. Graham have to do much, papa?"

"It will be an occasion of very great anxiety to him, no doubt." And then they began to return home,—Madeline forming a little plan in her mind by which Mr. Furnival and Mr. Chaffanbrass were to fail absolutely in making out that lady's innocence, but the fact was to be established to the satisfaction of the whole court, and of all the world, by the judicious energy of Felix Graham.

On their homeward journey the judge again spoke of pictures and books, of failures and successes, and Madeline listened to him gratefully. But she did not again take much part in the conversation. She could not now express a very fluent opinion on any subject, and to tell the truth, could have been well satisfied to have been left entirely to her own thoughts. But just before they came out again upon the road, her father stopped her and asked a direct question. "Tell me, Madeline, are you happy now?"

"Yes, papa."

"That is right. And what you are to understand is this; Mr. Graham will now be privileged by your mother and me to address you. He has already asked my permission to do so, and I told him that I must consider the matter before I either gave it or withheld it. I shall now give him that permission." Whereupon Madeline made her answer by a slight pressure upon his arm.

"But you may be sure of this, my dear; I shall be very discreet, and commit you to nothing. If he should choose to ask you any question, you will be at liberty to give him any answer that you may think fit." But Madeline at once confessed to herself that no such liberty remained to her. If Mr. Gaham should choose to ask her a certain question, it would be in her power

to give him only one answer. Had he been kept away, had her father told her that such a marriage might not be, she would not have broken her heart. She had already told herself, that under such circumstances, she could live and still live contented. But now,—now if the siege were made, the town would have to capitulate at the first shot. Was it not an understood thing that the governor had been recommended by the king to give up the keys as soon as they were asked for?

"You will tell your mamma of this, my dear," said the judge, as they were entering their own gate.

"Yes," said Madeline. But she felt that, in this matter, her father was more surely her friend than her mother. And indeed she could understand her mother's opposition to poor Felix, much better than her father's acquiescence.

"Do, my dear. What is anything to us in this world, if we are not all happy together? She thinks that you have become sad, and she must know that you are so no longer."

"But I have not been sad, papa," said Madeline, thinking with some pride of her past heroism.

When they reached the hall-door she had one more question to ask; but she could not look in her father's face as she asked.

"Papa, is that review you were speaking of here at Noningsby?"

"You will find it on my study table; but remember, Madeline, I don't above half go along with him."

The judge went into his study before dinner, and found that the review had been taken.

CHAPTER V

NO SURRENDER

SIR PEREGRINE ORME had gone up to London, had had his interview with Mr. Round, and had failed. He had then returned home, and hardly a word on the subject had been spoken between him and Mrs. Orme. Indeed little or nothing was now said between them as to Lady Mason or the trial. What was the use of speaking on a subject that was in every way the cause of so much misery? He had made up his mind that it was no longer possible for him to take any active step in the matter. He had become bail for her appearance in court, and that was the last trifling act of friendship which he could show her. How was it any longer possible that he could befriend her? He could not speak up on her behalf with eager voice, and strong indignation against her enemies, as had formerly been his practice. He could give her no counsel. His counsel would have taught her to abandon the property in the first instance, let the result be what it might. He had made his little effort in that direction by seeing the attorney, and his little effort had been useless. It was quite clear to him that there was nothing further for him to do;—nothing further for him, who but a week or two since was so actively putting himself forward and letting the world know that he was Lady Mason's champion.

Would he have to go into court as a witness? His

mind was troubled much in his endeavour to answer that question. He had been her great friend. For years he had been her nearest neighbor. His daughter-in-law still clung to her. She had lived at his house. She had been chosen to be his wife. Who could speak to her character, if he could not do so? And yet, what could he say, if so called on? Mr. Furnival, Mr. Chaffanbrass—all those who would have the selection of the witnesses, believing themselves in their client's innocence, as no doubt they did, would of course imagine that he believed in it also. Could he tell them that it would not be in his power to utter a single word in her favour?

In these days Mrs. Orme went daily to the Farm. Indeed, she never missed a day from that on which Lady Mason left The Cleeve up to the time of the trial. It seemed to Sir Peregrine that his daughter's affection for this woman had grown with the knowledge of her guilt; but, as I have said before, no discussion on the matter now took place between them. Mrs. Orme would generally take some opportunity of saying that she had been at Orley Farm; but that was all.

Sir Peregrine during this time never left the house once, except for morning service on Sundays. He hung his hat up on its accustomed peg when he returned from that ill-omened visit to Mr. Round, and did not move it for days, ay, for weeks,—except on Sunday mornings. At first his groom would come to him, suggesting to him that he should ride, and the woodman would speak to him about the young coppices; but after a few days they gave up their efforts. His grandson also strove to take him out, speaking to him more earnestly than the servants would do, but it was of no avail. Peregrine, indeed, gave up the attempt sooner, for to him his

grandfather did in some sort confess his own weakness. "I have had a blow," said he; "Peregrine, I have had a blow. I am too old to bear up against:—too old and too weak." Peregrine knew that he alluded in some way to that proposed marriage, but he was quite in the dark as to the manner in which his grandfather had been affected by it.

"People think nothing of that now, Sir," said he, groping in the dark as he strove to administer consolation.

"People will think of it;—and I think of it. But never mind, my boy. I have lived my life, and am contented with it. I have lived my life, and have great joy that such as you are left behind to take my place. If I had really injured you I should have broken my heart —have broken my heart."

Peregrine of course assured him that let what would come to him the pride which he had in his grandfather would always support him. "I don't know anybody else that I could be so proud of," said Peregrine; "for nobody else that I see thinks so much about other people. And I always was, even when I didn't seem to think much about it;—always."

Poor Peregrine! Circumstances had somewhat altered him since that day, now not more than six months ago, in which he had pledged himself to abandon the delights of Cowcross Street. As long as there was a hope for him with Madeline Staveley all this might be very well. He preferred Madeline to Cowcross Street with all its delights. But when there should be no longer any hope—and indeed, as things went now, there was but little ground for hoping—what then? Might it not be that his trial had come on him too early in life, and that he would solace himself in his

disappointment, if not with Carroty Bob, with companionships and pursuits which would be as objectionable, and perhaps more expensive?

On three or four occasions his grandfather asked him how things were going at Noningsby, striving to interest himself in something as to which the out-look was not altogether dismal, and by degrees learned—not exactly all the truth—but as much of the truth as Peregrine knew.

"Do as she tells you," said the grandfather, referring to Lady Staveley's last words.

"I suppose I must," said Peregrine, sadly. "There's nothing else for it. But if there's anything that I hate in this world, it's waiting."

"You are both very young," said his grandfather.

"Yes; we are what people call young, I suppose. But I don't understand all that. Why isn't a fellow to be happy when he's young as well as when he's old?"

Sir Peregrine did not answer him, but no doubt thought that he might alter his opinion in a few years. There is great doubt as to what may be the most enviable time of life with a man. I am inclined to think that it is at that period when his children have all been born but have not yet began to go astray or to vex him with disappointment; when his own pecuniary prospects are settled, and he knows pretty well what his tether will allow him; when the appetite is still good and the digestive organs at their full power; when he has ceased to care as to the length of his girdle, and before the doctor warns him against solid breakfasts and port wine after dinner; when his affectations are over and his infirmities have not yet come upon him; while he can still walk his ten miles, and feel some little pride in being able to do so; while he has still nerve

to ride his horse to hounds, and can look with some scorn on the ignorance of younger men who have hardly yet learned that noble art. As regards men, this, I think is the happiest time of life; but who shall answer the question as regards women? In this respect their lot is more liable to disappointment. With the choicest flowers that blow the sweetest aroma of their perfection lasts but for a moment. The hour that sees them at their fullest glory sees also the beginning of their fall.

On one morning before the trial Sir Peregrine rang his bell and requested that Mr. Peregrine might be asked to come to him. Mr. Peregrine was out at the moment, and did not make his appearance much before dark, but the baronet had fully resolved upon having this interview, and ordered that the dinner should be put back for half an hour. "Tell Mrs. Orme, with my compliments," he said, "that if it does not put her to inconvenience we will not dine till seven." It put Mrs. Orme to no inconvenience; but I am inclined to agree with the cook, who remarked that the compliments ought to have been sent to her.

"Sit down, Peregrine," he said, when his grandson entered his room with his thick boots and muddy gaiters. "I have been thinking of something."

"I and Samson have been cutting down trees all day," said Peregrine. "You've no conception how the water lies down in the bottom there; and there's a fall every yard down to the river. It's a sin not to drain it."

"Any sins of that kind, my boy, shall lie on your own head for the future. I will wash my hands of them."

"Then I'll go to work at once," said Peregrine, not quite understanding his grandfather.

"You must go to work on more than that, Pere-

grine." And then the old man paused. " You must not think that I am doing this because I am unhappy for the hour, or that I shall repent it when the moment has gone by."

" Doing what? " asked Peregrine.

" I have thought much of it, and I know that I am right. I cannot get out as I used to do, and do not care to meet people about business."

" I never knew you more clear-headed in my life, Sir."

" Well, perhaps not. We'll say nothing about that. What I intend to do is this;—to give up the property into your hands at Lady-day. You shall be master of The Cleeve from that time forth."

" Sir? "

" The truth is, you desire employment, and I don't. The property is small, and therefore wants the more looking after. I have never had a regular land steward, but have seen to that myself. If you'll take my advice you'll do the same. There is no better employment for a gentleman. So now, my boy, you may go to work and drain wherever you like. About the Crutchley Bottom I have no doubt you're right. I don't know why it has been neglected." These last words the baronet uttered in a weak, melancholy tone, asking, as it were, forgiveness for his faults; whereas he had spoken out the purport of his great resolution with a clear, strong voice, as though the saying of the words pleased him well.

" I could not hear of such a thing as that," said his grandson, after a short pause.

" But you have heard it, Perry, and you may be quite sure that I should not have named it had I not fully resolved upon it. I have been thinking of it for days,

and have quite made up my mind. You won't turn me out of the house, I know."

"All the same. I will not hear of it," said the young man, stoutly.

"Peregrine!"

"I know very well what it all means, Sir, and I am not at all astonished. You have wished to do something out of sheer goodness of heart, and you have been balked."

"We will not talk about that, Peregrine."

"But I must say a few words about it. All that has made you unhappy, and—and—and—" He wanted to explain that his grandfather was ashamed of his baffled attempt, and for that reason was cowed and down at heart at the present moment; but that in the three or four months when this trial would be over and the wonder passed away, all that would be forgotten, and he would be again as well as ever. But Peregrine, though he understood all this, was hardly able to express himself.

"My boy," said the old man, "I know very well what you mean. What you say is partly true, and partly not quite true. Some day, perhaps, when we are sitting here together over the fire, I shall be better able to talk over all this; but not now, Perry. God has been very good to me, and given me so much that I will not repine at this sorrow. I have lived my life, and am content."

"Oh yes, of course all that's true enough. And if God should choose that you should—die, you know, or I either, some people would be sorry, but we shouldn't complain ourselves. But what I say is this: you should never give up as long as you live. There's a sort of feeling about it which I can't explain. One should

always say to oneself, No surrender." And Peregrine, as he spoke, stood up from his chair, thrust his hands into his trousers-pockets, and shook his head.

Sir Peregrine smiled as he answered him. "But, Perry, my boy, we can't always say that. When the heart and the spirit and the body have all surrendered, why should the voice tell a foolish falsehood?"

"But it shouldn't be a falsehood," said Peregrine. "Nobody should ever knock under of his own accord."

"You are quite right there, my boy, you are quite right there. Stick to that yourself. But, remember, that you are not to knock under to any of your enemies. The worst that you will meet with are folly, and vice, and extravagance."

"That's of course," said Peregrine, by no means wishing on the present occasion to bring under discussion his future contests with any such enemies as those now named by his grandfather.

"And now, suppose we dress for dinner," said the baronet. "I've got ahead of you there you see. What I've told you to-day I have already told your mother."

"I'm sure she doesn't think you right."

"If she thinks me wrong, she is too kind and well-behaved to say so,—which is more than I can say for her son. Your mother, Perry, never told me that I was wrong yet, though she has had many occasions;—too many, too many. But, come, go and dress for dinner."

"You are wrong in this, Sir, if ever you were wrong in your life," said Peregrine, leaving the room. His grandfather did not answer him again, but followed him out of the room, and walked briskly across the hall into the drawing-room.

"There's Peregrine been lecturing me about draining," he said to his daughter-in-law, striving to speak

in a half-bantering tone of voice, as though things were going well with him.

"Lecturing you!" said Mrs. Orme.

"And he's right, too. There's nothing like it. He'll make a better farmer, I take it, than Lucius Mason. You'll live to see him know the value of an acre of land as well as any man in the county. It's the very thing that he's fit for. He'll do better with the property than ever I did."

There was something beautiful in the effort which the old man was making when watched by the eyes of one who knew him as well as did his daughter-in-law. She knew him, and understood all the workings of his mind, and the deep sorrow of his heart. In very truth, the star of his life was going out darkly under a cloud; but he was battling against his sorrow and shame—not that he might be rid of them himself, but that others might not have to share them. That doctrine of "No surrender" was strong within his bosom, and he understood the motto in a finer sense than that in which his grandson had used it. He would not tell them that his heart was broken, not if he could help it. He would not display his wound if it might be in his power to hide it. He would not confess that lands, and houses, and seigniorial functions were no longer of value in his eyes. As far as might be possible he would bear his own load till that and the memory of his last folly might be hidden together in the grave.

But he knew that he was no longer fit for a man's work, and that it would be well that he should abandon it. He had made a terrible mistake. In his old age he had gambled for a large stake, and had lost it all. He had ventured to love,—to increase the small number of those who were nearest and dearest to him, to add one

to those whom he regarded as best and purest,—and he had been terribly deceived. He had for many years almost worshipped the one lady who had sat at his table, and now in his old age he had asked her to share her place of honour with another. What that other was need not now be told. And the world knew that this woman was to have been his wife! He had boasted loudly that he would give her that place and those rights. He had ventured his all upon her innocence and her purity. He had ventured his all,—and he had lost.

I do not say that on this account there was any need that he should be stricken to the ground—that it behoved him as a man of high feeling to be broken-hearted. He would have been a greater man had he possessed the power to bear up against all this, and to go forth to the world bearing his burden bravely on his shoulders. But Sir Peregrine Orme was not a great man, and possessed few or none of the elements of greatness. He was a man of a singularly pure mind, and endowed with a strong feeling of chivalry. It had been everything to him to be spoken of by the world as a man free from reproach,—who had lived with clean hands and with clean people around him. All manner of delinquencies he could forgive in his dependants which did not tell of absolute baseness; but it would have half killed him had he ever learned that those he loved had become false or fraudulent. When his grandson had come to trouble about the rats, he had acted, not over-cleverly, a certain amount of paternal anger; but had Peregrine broken his promise to him, no acting would have been necessary. It may therefore be imagined what were now his feelings as to Lady Mason.

Her he could forgive for deceiving him. He had told his daughter-in-law that he would forgive her; and it was a thing done. But he could not forgive himself in that he had been deceived. He could not forgive himself for having mingled with the sweet current of his Edith's life the foul waters of that criminal tragedy. He could not now bid her desert Lady Mason; for was it not true that the woman's wickedness was known to them two, through her resolve not to injure those who had befriended her? But all this made the matter worse rather than better to him. It was all very well to say, "No surrender;" but when the load placed upon the back is too heavy to be borne, the back must break or bend beneath it.

His load was too heavy to be borne, and therefore he said to himself that he would put it down. He would not again see Lord Alston and the old friends of former days. He would attend no more at the magistrates' bench, but would send his grandson out into his place. For the few days that remained to him in this world, he might be well contented to abandon the turmoils and troubles of life. "It will not be for long," he said to himself over and over again. And then he would sit in his arm-chair for hours, intending to turn his mind to such solemn thoughts as might befit a dying man. But as he sat there, he would still think of Lady Mason. He would remember her as she had leaned against his breast on that day that he kissed her; and then he would remember her as she was when she spoke those horrid words to him—"Yes; I did it; at night, when I was alone." And this was the woman whom he had loved! This was the woman whom he still loved,—if all the truth might be confessed.

His grandson, though he read much of his grand-

father's mind, had failed to read it all. He did not know how often Sir Peregrine repeated to himself those words, "No Surrender," or how gallantly he strove to live up to them. Lands and money and seats of honour he would surrender, as a man surrenders his tools when he has done his work; but his tone of feeling and his principle he would not surrender, though the maintenance of them should crush him with their weight. The woman had been very vile, desperately false, wicked beyond belief, with premeditated villainy, for years and years;—and this was the woman whom he had wished to make the bosom companion of his latter days!

"Samson is happy now, I suppose, that he has got the axe in his hand," he said to his grandson.

"Pretty well for that, Sir, I think."

"That man will cut down every tree about the place, if you'll let him." And in that way he strove to talk about the affairs of the property.

CHAPTER VI

WHAT REBEKAH DID FOR HER SON

EVERY day Mrs. Orme went up to Orley Farm and sat for two hours with Lady Mason. We may say that there was now no longer any secret between them, and that she whose life had been so innocent, so pure, and so good, could look into the inmost heart and soul of that other woman whose career had been supported by the proceeds of one terrible life-long iniquity. And now, by degrees, Lady Mason would begin to plead for herself, or, rather, to put in a plea for the deed she had done, acknowledging, however, that she, the doer of it, had fallen almost below forgiveness through the crime. "Was he not his son as much as that other one; and had I not deserved of him that he should do this thing for me?" And again, "Never once did I ask of him any favour for myself from the day that I gave myself to him, because he had been good to my father and mother. Up to the very hour of his death I never asked him to spend a shilling on my own account. But I asked him to do this thing for his child; and when at last he refused me, I told him that I myself would cause it to be done."

"You told him so?"

"I did; and I think that he believed me. He knew that I was one who would act up to my word. I told him that Orley Farm should belong to our babe."

"And what did he say?"

"He bade me beware of my soul. My answer was

very terrible, and I will not shock you with it. Ah me ! it is easy to talk of repentance, but repentance will not come with a word."

In these days Mrs. Orme became gradually aware that hitherto she had comprehended but little of Lady Mason's character. There was a power of endurance about her, and a courage that was almost awful to the mind of the weaker, softer, and better woman. Lady Mason, during her sojourn at The Cleeve, had seemed almost to sink under her misfortune; nor had there been any hypocrisy, any pretence in her apparent misery. She had been very wretched;—as wretched a human creature, we may say, as any crawling God's earth at that time. But she had borne her load, and, bearing it, had gone about her work, still striving with desperate courage as the ground on which she trod continued to give way beneath her feet, inch by inch. They had known and pitied her misery; they had loved her for misery—as it is in the nature of such people to do;—but they had little known how great had been the cause for it. They had sympathised with the female weakness which had succumbed when there was hardly any necessity for succumbing. Had they then known all, they would have wondered at the strength which made a struggle possible under such circumstances.

Even now she would not yield. I have said that there had been no hypocrisy in her misery during those weeks last past; and I have said so truly. But there had perhaps been some pretences, some acting of a part, some almost necessary pretences as to her weakness. Was she not bound to account to those around her for her great sorrow? And was it not above all things needful that she should enlist their sympathy and obtain their aid? She had been obliged to cry to them for help,

though obliged also to confess that there was little reason for such crying. "I am a woman, and weak," she had said, "and therefore cannot walk alone now that the way is stony." But what had been the truth with her? How would she have cried, had it been possible for her to utter the sharp cry of her heart? The waters had been closing over her head, and she had clutched at a hand to save her; but the owner of that hand might not know how imminent, how close was the danger.

But in these days, as she sat in her own room with Mrs. Orme, the owner of that hand might know everything. The secret had been told, and there was no longer need for pretence. As she could now expose to view the whole load of her wretchedness, so also could she make known the strength that was still left for endurance. And these two women who had become endeared to each other under such terrible circumstances, came together at these meetings with more of the equality of friendship than had ever existed at The Cleeve. It may seem strange that it should be so—strange that the acknowledged forger of her husband's will should be able to maintain a better claim for equal friendship than the lady who was believed to be innocent and true! But it was so. Now she stood on true ground; —now, as she sat there with Mrs. Orme, she could speak from her heart, pouring forth the real workings of her mind. From Mrs. Orme she had no longer aught to fear; nor from Sir Peregrine. Everything was known to them, and she could now tell of every incident of her crime with an outspoken boldness that in itself was incompatible with the humble bearing of an inferior in the presence of one above her.

And she did still hope. The one point to be gained

was this; that her son, her only son, the child on whose behalf this crime had been committed, should never know her shame, or live to be disgraced by her guilt. If she could be punished, she would say, and he left in ignorance of her punishment, she would not care what indignities they might heap upon her. She had heard of penal servitude, of years terribly long, passed in all the misery of vile companionship; of solitary confinement, and the dull madness which it engenders; of all the terrors of a life spent under circumstances bearable only by the uneducated, the rude, and the vile. But all this was as nothing to her compared with the loss of honour to her son. "I should live," she would say; "but he would die. You cannot ask me to become his murderer!"

It was on this point that they differed always. Mrs. Orme would have had her confess everything to Lucius, and strove to make her understand that if he were so told, the blow would fall less heavily than it would do if the knowledge came to him from her conviction at the trial. But the mother would not bring herself to believe that it was absolutely necessary that he should ever know it. "There was the property! Yes; but let the trial come, and if she were acquitted, then let some arrangement be made about that. The lawyers might find out some cause why it should be surrendered." But Mrs. Orme feared that if the trial were over, and the criminal saved from justice, the property would not be surrendered. And then, how would that wish of repentance be possible? After all, was not that the one thing necessary?

I will not say that Mrs. Orme in these days ever regretted that her sympathy and friendship had been thus bestowed, but she frequently acknowledged to her-

self that the position was too difficult for her. There was no one whose assistance she could ask; for she felt that she could not in this matter ask counsel from Sir Peregrine. She herself was good, and pure, and straight-minded, and simple in her perception of right and wrong; but Lady Mason was greater than she in force of character,—a stronger woman in every way, endowed with more force of will, with more power of mind, with greater energy, and a swifter flow of words. Sometimes she almost thought it would be better that she should stay away from Orley Farm; but then she had promised to be true to her wretched friend, and the mother's solicitude for her son still softened the mother's heart.

In these days, till the evening came, Lucius Mason never made his way into his mother's sitting-room, which indeed was the drawing-room of the house, and he and Mrs. Orme, as a rule, hardly ever met each other. If he saw her as she entered or left the place, he would lift his hat to her and pass by without speaking. He was not admitted to those councils of his mother's and would not submit to ask after his mother's welfare or to inquire as to her affairs from a stranger. On no other subject was it possible that he should now speak to the daily visitor and the only visitor at Orley Farm. All this Mrs. Orme understood, and saw that the young man was alone and comfortless. He passed his hours below in his own room, and twice a day his mother found him in the parlour, and then they sat through their silent, miserable meals. She would then leave him, always saying some soft words of motherly love, and putting her hand either upon his shoulder or his arm. On such occasions he was never rough to her, but he would never respond to her caress. She had

ill-treated him, preferring in her trouble the assistance of a stranger to his assistance. She would ask him neither for his money nor his counsel, and as she had thus chosen to stand aloof from him, he also would stand aloof from her. Not for always,—as he said to himself over and over again, for his heart misgave him when he saw the lines of care so plainly written on his mother's brow. Not for always should it be so. The day of the trial would soon be present, and the day of the trial would soon be over; then again would they be friends. Poor young man! Unfortunate young man!

Mrs. Orme saw all this, and to her it was very terrible. What would be the world to her, if her boy should frown at her, and look black when she caressed him? And she thought that it was the fault of the mother rather than of the son; as indeed was not all that wretchedness the mother's fault? But then again, there was the one great difficulty. How could any step be taken in the right direction till the whole truth had been confessed to him?

The two women were sitting together in that up stairs room; and the day of the trial was now not a full week distant from them, when Mrs. Orme again tried to persuade the mother to intrust her son with the burden of all her misery. On the preceding day Mr. Solomon Aram had been down at Orley Farm, and had been with Lady Mason for an hour.

"He knows the truth!" Lady Mason had said to her friend. "I am sure of that."

"But did he ask you?"

"Oh, no, he did not ask me that. He asked of little things that happened at the time; but from his manner I am sure he knows it all. He says—that I shall escape."

"Did he say escape?"

"No; not that word, but it was the same thing. He spoke to Lucius for I saw them on the lawn together."

"You do not know what he said to him?"

"No; for Lucius would not speak to me, and I could not ask him." And then they both were silent, for Mrs. Orme was thinking how she could bring about that matter that was so near her heart. Lady Mason was seated in a large old-fashioned arm-chair, in which she now passed nearly all her time. The table was by her side, but she rarely turned herself to it. She sat leaning with her elbow on her arm, supporting her face with her hand; and opposite to her, so close that she might look into her face and watch every movement of her eyes, sat Mrs. Orme,—intent upon that one thing, that the woman before her should be brought to repent the evil she had done.

"And you have not spoken to Lucius?"

"No," she answered. "No more than I have told you. What could I say to him about the man?"

"Not about Mr. Aram. It might not be necessary to speak of him. He has his work to do; and I suppose that he must do it in his own way?"

"Yes; he must do it, in his own way. Lucius would not understand."

"Unless you told him everything of course he could not understand."

"That is impossible."

"No, Lady Mason, it is not impossible. Dear Lady Mason, do not turn from me in that way. It is for your sake,—because I love you, that I press you to do this. If he knew it all——"

"Could you tell your son such a tale?" said Lady

Mason, turning upon her sharply, and speaking almost with an air of anger.

Mrs. Orme was for a moment silenced, for she could not at once bring herself to conceive it possible that she could be so circumstanced. But at last she answered. "Yes," she said, "I think I could if—" And then she paused.

"If you had done such a deed! Ah, you do not know, for the doing of it would be impossible to you. You can never understand what was my childhood, and how my young years were passed. I never loved anything but him;—that is, till I knew you, and—and—" But instead of finishing her sentence she pointed down towards The Cleeve. "How, then, can I tell him? Mrs. Orme, I would let them pull me to pieces, bit by bit, if in that way I could save him."

"Not in that way," said Mrs. Orme; "not in that way."

But Lady Mason went on pouring forth the pent-up feelings of her bosom, not regarding the faint words of her companion. "Till he lay in my arms I had loved nothing. From my earliest years I had been taught to love money, wealth, and property; but as to myself the teachings had never come home to me. When they bade me marry the old man because he was rich, I obeyed them,—not caring for his riches, but knowing that it behoved me to relieve them of the burden of my support. He was kinder to me than they had been, and I did for him the best I could. But his money and his wealth were little to me. He told me over and over again that when he died I should have the means to live, and that was enough. I would not pretend to him that I cared for the grandeur of his children who despised me. But then came my baby, and the world

was all altered for me. What could I do for the only thing that I had ever called my own? Money and riches they had told me were everything."

"But they had told you wrong," said Mrs. Orme as she wiped the tears from her eyes.

"They had told me falsely. I had heard nothing but falsehoods from my youth upwards," she answered fiercely. "For myself I had not cared for these things; but why should not he have money and riches and land? His father had them to give over and above what had already made those sons and daughters so rich and proud. Why should not this other child also be his father's heir? Was he not as well born as they? was he not as fair a child? What did Rebekah do Mrs. Orme? Did she not do worse; and did it not all go well with her? Why should my boy be an Ishmael? Why should I be treated as the bondwoman, and see my little one perish of thirst in this world's wilderness?"

"No Saviour had lived and died for the world in those days," said Mrs. Orme.

"And no Saviour had lived and died for me," said the wretched woman almost shrieking in her despair. The lines of her face were terrible to be seen as she thus spoke, and an agony of anguish loaded her brow upon which Mrs. Orme was frightened to look. She fell on her knees before the wretched woman, and taking her by both her hands strove all she could to find some comfort for her.

"Ah, do not say so. Do not say that. Whatever may come, that misery—that worst of miseries need not oppress you. If that indeed were true!"

"It was true;—and how should it be otherwise?"

"But now,—now. It need not be true now. Lady Mason, for your soul's sake say that it is so now."

"Mrs. Orme," she said, speaking with a singular quiescence of tone after the violence of her last words, "it seems to me that I care more for his soul than for my own. For myself I can bear even that. But if he were a castaway——!"

I will not attempt to report the words that passed between them for the next half hour, for they concerned a matter which I may not dare to handle too closely in such pages as these. But Mrs. Orme still knelt there at her feet, pressing Lady Mason's hands, pressing against her knees, as with all the eagerness of true affection she endeavoured to bring her to a frame of mind that would admit of some comfort. But it all ended in this:—Let everything be told to Lucius, so that the first step back to honesty might be taken,—and then let them trust to Him whose mercy can ever temper the wind to the shorn lamb.

But, as Lady Mason had once said to herself, repentance will not come with a word. "I cannot tell him," she said at last. "It is a thing impossible. I should die at his feet before the words were spoken."

"I will do it for you," said Mrs. Orme, offering from pure charity to take upon herself a task perhaps as heavy as any that a human creature could perform. "I will tell him."

"No, no," screamed Lady Mason, taking Mrs. Orme by both her arms as she spoke. "You will not do so; say that you will not. Remember your promise to me. Remember why it is that you know it all yourself."

"I will not, surely, unless you bid me," said Mrs. Orme.

"No, no; I do not bid you. Mind I do not bid you. I will not have it done. Better anything than that

while it may yet be avoided. I have your promise; have I not?"

"Oh, yes; of course I should not do it unless you told me." And then after some further short stay, during which but little was said, Mrs. Orme got up to go.

"You will come to me to-morrow," said Lady Mason.

"Yes, certainly," said Mrs. Orme.

"Because I feared that I had offended you."

"Oh, no; I will take no offence from you."

"You should not, for you know what I have to bear. You know and no one else knows. Sir Peregrine does not know. He cannot understand. But you know and understand it all. And, Mrs. Orme, what you do now will be counted to you for great treasure,—for very great treasure. You are better than the Samaritan, for he went on his way. But you will stay till the last. Yes; I know you will stay." And the poor creature kissed her only friend;—kissed her hands and her forehead and her breast. Then Mrs. Orme went without speaking, for her heart was full and the words would not come to her; but as she went she said to herself that she would stay till the last.

Standing alone on the steps before the front door she found Lucius Mason all alone, and some feeling moved her to speak a word to him as she passed. "I hope all this does not trouble you much, Mr. Mason," she said, offering her hand to him. She felt that her words were hypocritical as she was speaking them; but under such circumstances what else could she say to him?

"Well, Mrs. Orme, such an episode in one's family history does give one some trouble. I am unhappy,—very unhappy; but not too much so to thank you for your most unusual kindness to my poor mother." And

then having been so far encouraged by her speaking to him, he accompanied her round the house on to the lawn, from whence a path led away through a shrubbery on to a road which would take her by the village of Coldharbour to The Cleeve.

"Mr. Mason," she said as they walked for a few steps together before the house, "do not suppose that I presume to interfere between you and your mother."

"You have a right to interfere now," he said.

"But I think you might comfort her if you would be more with her. Would it not be better if you could talk freely together about all this?"

"It would be better," he said; "but I fear that that is no longer possible. When this trial is over, and the world knows that she is innocent; when people shall see how cruelly she has been used—"

Mrs. Orme might not tell the truth to him, but she could with difficulty bear to hear him dwell thus confidently on hopes which were so false. "The future is in the hands of God, Mr. Mason; but for the present—"

"The present and the future are both in His hands, Mrs. Orme. I know my mother's innocence, and would have done a son's part towards establishing it; but she would not allow me. All this will soon be over now, and then, I trust, she and I will once again understand each other. Till then I doubt whether I should be wise to interfere. Good-morning, Mrs. Orme; and pray believe that I appreciate at its full worth all that you are doing for her." Then he again lifted his hat and left her.

Lady Mason from her window saw them as they walked together, and her heart for a moment misgave her. Could it be that her friend was treacherous to

her? Was it possible that even now she was telling everything that she had sworn that she would not tell? Why were they two together, seeing that they passed each other day by day without intercourse? And so she watched with anxious eyes till they parted, and then she saw that Lucius stood idly on the terrace swinging his stick as he looked down the hill towards the orchard below him. He would not have stood thus calmly had he already heard his mother's shame. This she knew, and having laid aside her immediate fears she retreated back to her chair. No; she would not tell him: at any rate till the trial should be over.

CHAPTER VII

THE STATE OF PUBLIC OPINION

THE day of the trial was now quickly coming on, and the London world, especially the world of lawyers, was beginning to talk much on the subject. Men about the Inns of Court speculated as to the verdict, offering to each other very confident opinions as to the result, and offering, on some occasions, bets as well as opinions. The younger world of barristers was clearly of opinion that Lady Mason was innocent; but a portion, an unhappy portion, was inclined to fear, that, in spite of her innocence, she would be found guilty. The elder world of barristers was not, perhaps, so demonstrative, but in that world the belief in her innocence was not so strong, and the fear of her condemnation much stronger. The attorneys, as a rule, regarded her as guilty. To the policeman's mind every man not a policeman is a guilty being, and the attorneys perhaps share something of this feeling. But the attorneys to a man expected to see her acquitted. Great was their faith in Mr. Furnival; great their faith in Solomon Aram; but greater than in all was their faith in Mr. Chaffanbrass. If Mr. Chaffanbrass could not pull her through, with a prescription of twenty years on her side, things must be very much altered indeed in our English criminal court. To the outer world, that portion of the

world which had nothing to do with the administration of the law, the idea of Lady Mason having been guilty seemed preposterous. Of course she was innocent, and of course she would be found to be innocent. And of course, also, that Joseph Mason of Groby Park was, and would be found to be, the meanest, the lowest, the most rapacious of mankind.

And then the story of Sir Peregrine's attachment and proposed marriage, joined as it was to various hints of the manner in which that marriage had been broken off, lent a romance to the whole affair, and added much to Lady Mason's popularity. Everybody had now heard of it, and everybody was also aware, that though the idea of a marriage had been abandoned, there had been no quarrel. The friendship between the families was as close as ever, and Sir Peregrine—so it was understood—had pledged himself to an acquittal. It was felt to be a public annoyance that an affair of so exciting a nature should be allowed to come off in the little town of Alston. The court-house, too, was very defective in its arrangements, and ill qualified to give accommodation to the great body of would-be attendants at the trial. One leadings newspaper went so far as to suggest, that in such a case as this, the antediluvian prejudices of the British grandmother—meaning the Constitution—should be set aside, and the trial should take place in London. But I am not aware that any step was taken towards the carrying out of so desirable a project.

Down at Hamworth the feeling in favour of Lady Mason was not perhaps so strong as it was elsewhere. Dockwrath was a man not much respected, but nevertheless many believed in him; and down there, in the streets of Hamworth, he was not slack in propagat-

ing his view of the question. He had no doubt, he said, how the case would go. He had no doubt, although he was well aware that Mr. Mason's own lawyers would do all they could to throw over their own client. But he was too strong, he said, even for that. The facts as he would bring them forward would confound Round and Crook, and compel any jury to find a verdict of guilty. I do not say that all Hamworth believed in Dockwrath, but his energy and confidence did have its effect, and Lady Mason's case was not upheld so strongly in her own neighbourhood as elsewhere.

The witnesses in these days were of course very important persons, and could not but feel the weight of that attention which the world would certainly pay to them. There would be four chief witnesses for the prosecution; Dockwrath himself, who would be prepared to speak as to the papers left behind him by old Usbech; the man in whose possession now remained that deed respecting the partnership which was in truth executed by old Sir Joseph on that fourteenth of July; Bridget Bolster; and John Kenneby. Of the manner in which Mr. Dockwrath used his position we already know enough. The man who held the deed, one Torrington, was a relative of Martock, Sir Joseph's partner, and had been one of his executors. It was not much indeed that he had to say, but that little sent him up high in the social scale during those days. He lived at Kennington, and he was asked out to dinner in that neighbourhood every day for a week running, on the score of his connection with the great Orley Farm case. Bridget Bolster was still down at the hotel in the West of England, and being of a solid, sensible, and somewhat unimaginative turn of mind, probably went through her duties to the last without much

change of manner. But the effect of the coming scenes upon poor John Kenneby was terrible. It was to him as though for the time they had made of him an Atlas, and compelled him to bear on his weak shoulders the weight of the whole world. Men did talk much about Lady Mason and the coming trial; but to him it seemed as though men talked of nothing else. At Hubbles and Grease's it was found useless to put figures into his lands till all this should be over. Indeed it was doubted by many whether he would ever recover his ordinary tone of mind. It seemed to be understood that he would be cross-examined by Chaffanbrass, and there were those who thought that John Kenneby would never again be equal to a day's work after that which he would then be made to endure. That he would have been greatly relieved could the whole thing have been wiped away from him there can be no manner of doubt; but I fancy that he would also have been disappointed. It is much to be great for a day, even though that day's greatness should cause the shipwreck of a whole life.

"I shall endeavour to speak the truth," said John Kenneby, solemnly.

"The truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth," said Moulder.

"Yes, Moulder, that will be my endeavour; and then I may lay my hand upon my bosom and think that I have done my duty by my country." And as Kenneby spoke he suited the action to the word.

"Quite right, John," said Mrs. Smiley. "Them's the sentiments of a man, and I, as a woman having a right to speak where you are concerned, quite approve of them."

"They'll get nothing but the truth out of John,"

said Mrs. Moulder; "not if he knows it." These last words she added, actuated by admiration of what she had heard of Mr. Chaffanbrass, and perhaps with some little doubt as to her brother's firmness.

"That's where it is," said Moulder. "Lord bless you, John, they'll turn you round their finger like a bit of red tape. Truth! Gammon! What do they care for truth?"

"But I care, Moulder," said Kenneby. "I don't suppose they can make me tell falsehoods if I don't wish it."

"Not if you're the man I take you to be," said Mrs. Smiley.

"Gammon!" said Moulder.

"Mr. Moulder, that's an objectionable word," said Mrs. Smiley. "If John Kenneby is the man I take him to be,—and who's a right to speak if I haven't, seeing that I am going to commit myself for this world into his hands?"—and Mrs. Smiley, as she spoke, simpered, and looked down with averted head on the fulness of her Irish tabinet—"if he's the man that I take him to be, he won't say on this thrilling occasion no more than the truth, nor yet no less. Now that isn't gammon—if I know what gammon is."

It will have been already seen that the party in question were assembled at Mr. Moulder's room in Great St. Helen's. There had been a little supper party there to commemorate the final arrangements as to the coming marriage; and the four were now sitting round the fire with their glasses of hot toddy at their elbows. Moulder was armed with his pipe, and was enjoying himself in that manner which most delighted him. When last we saw him he had somewhat exceeded discretion in his cups and was not comfortable. But at

the present nothing ailed him. The supper had been good, the tobacco was good, and the toddy was good. Therefore when the lovely Thais sitting beside him,—Thais however on this occasion having been provided not for himself but for his brother-in-law,—when Thais objected to the use of his favourite word, he merely chuckled down in the bottom of his fat throat, and allowed her to finish her sentence.

Poor John Kenneby had more—much more, on his hands than this dreadful trial. Since he had declared that the Adriatic was free to wed another, he had found himself devoted and given up to Mrs. Smiley. For some days after that auspicious evening there had been considerable wrangling between Mrs. Moulder and Mrs. Smiley as to the proceeds of the brick-field; and on this question Moulder himself had taken a part. The Moulder interest had of course desired that all right of management in the brick-field should be vested in the husband, seeing that, according to the usages of this country, brick-fields and their belongings appertain rather to men than to women; but Mrs. Smiley had soon made it evident that she by no means intended to be merely a sleeping partner in the firm. At one time Kenneby had entertained a hope of escape; for neither would the Moulder interest give way, nor would the Smiley. But two hundred a year was a great stake, and at last the thing was arranged, very much in accordance with the original Smiley view. And now at this most trying period of his life, poor Kenneby had upon his mind all the cares of a lover as well as the cares of a witness.

"I shall do my best," said John. "I shall do my best and then throw myself upon Providence."

"And take a little drop of something comfortable in

your pocket," said his sister, "so as to sperrit you up a little when your name's called."

"Sperrit him up!" said Moulder; "why I suppose he'll be standing in that box the best part of a day. I knowed a man was a witness; it was a case of horse-stealing; and the man who was the witness was the man who'd took the horse."

"And he was witness against hisself!" said Mrs. Smiley.

"No; he'd paid for it. That is to say, either he had or he hadn't. That was what they wanted to get out of him, and I'm blessed if he didn't take 'em till the judge wouldn't set there any longer. And then they hadn't got it out of him."

"But John Kenneby aint one of that sort," said Mrs. Smiley.

"I suppose that man did not want to unbosom himself," said Kenneby.

"Well; no. The likes of him seldom do like to unbosom themselves," said Moulder.

"But that will be my desire. If they will only allow me to speak freely whatever I know about this matter, I will give them no trouble."

"You mean to act honest, John," said his sister.

"I always did, Mary Anne."

"Well now, I'll tell you what it is," said Moulder. "As Mrs. Smiley don't like it I won't say anything more about gammon;—not just at present, that is."

"I've no objection to gammon, Mr. Moulder, when properly used," said Mrs. Smiley, "but I look on it as disrespectful; and seeing the position which I hold as regards John Kenneby, anything disrespectful to him is hurtful to my feelings."

"All right," said Moulder. "And now, John, I'll

just tell what it is. You've no more chance of being allowed to speak freely there than—than—than—no more than if you was in church. What are them fellows paid for if you're to say whatever you pleases out in your own way?"

"He only wants to say the truth, M.," said Mrs. Moulder, who probably knew less than her husband of the general usages of courts of law.

"Truth be —," said Moulder.

"Mr. Moulder!" said Mrs. Smiley. "There's ladies by, if you'll please to remember."

"To hear such nonsense sets one past oneself," continued he; "as if all those lawyers were brought together there—the cleverest and sharpest fellows in the kingdom, mind you—to listen to a man like John here telling his own story in his own way. You'll have to tell your story in their way; that is, in two different ways. There'll be one fellow 'll make you tell it his way first, and another fellow 'll make you tell it again his way afterwards; and its odd but what the first 'll be at you again after that, till you won't know whether you stand on your heels or your head."

"That can't be right," said Mrs. Moulder.

"And why can't it be right?" said Moulder. "They're paid for it; it's their duties; just as it's my duty to sell Hubbles and Grease's sugar. It's not for me to say the sugar's bad, or the samples not equal to the last. My duty is to sell, and I sell;—and it's their duty to get a verdict."

"But the truth, Moulder——!" said Kenneby.

"Gammon!" said Moulder. "Begging your pardon Mrs. Smiley, for making use of the expression. Look you here, John; if you're paid to bring a man off not guilty, won't you bring him off if you can? I've been

at trials times upon times, and listened till I've wished from the bottom of my heart that I'd been brought up a barrister. Not that I think much of myself, and I mean of course with education and all that accordingly. It's beautiful to hear them. You'll see a little fellow in a wig, and he'll get up; and there'll be a man in the box before him,—some swell dressed up to his eyes, who thinks no end of strong beer of himself; and in about ten minutes he'll be as flabby as wet paper, and he'll say—on his oath, mind you,—just anything that that little fellow wants him to say. That's power, mind you, and I call it beautiful."

"But it ain't justice," said Mrs. Smiley.

"Why not? I say it is justice. You can have it if you choose to pay for it, and so can I. If I buy a great-coat against the winter, and you go out at night without having one, is it injustice because you're perished by the cold while I'm as warm as a toast? I say it is a grand thing to live in a country where one can buy a greatcoat."

The argument got so far, Mr. Moulder certainly having the best of it, when a ring at the outer door was heard.

"Now who on earth is that?" said Moulder.

"Snergkeld, I shouldn't wonder," said his wife.

"I hope it aint no stranger," said Mrs. Smiley. "Situated as John and I are now, strangers is so disagreeable." And then the door was opened by the maid-servant, and Mr. Kantwise was shown into the room.

"Halioa, Kantwise!" said Mr. Moulder, not rising from his chair, or giving any very decided tokens of welcome. "I thought you were down somewhere among the iron foundries?"

"So I was, Mr. Moulder, but I came up yesterday. Mrs. Moulder, allow me to have the honour. I hope I see you quite well; but looking at you I need not ask. Mr. Kenneby, Sir, your very humble servant. The day's coming on fast; isn't it, Mr. Kenneby? Ma'am, your very obedient. I believe I haven't the pleasure of being acquainted."

"Mrs. Smiley, Mr. Kantwise. Mr. Kantwise, Mrs. Smiley," said the lady of the house, introducing her visitors to each other in the appropriate way.

"Quite delighted, I'm sure," said Kantwise.

"Smiley as is, and Kenneby as will be this day three weeks," said Moulder; and then they all enjoyed that little joke, Mrs. Smiley by no means appearing bashful in the matter, although Mr. Kantwise was a stranger.

"I thought I should find Mr. Kenneby here," said Kantwise, when the subject of the coming nuptials had been sufficiently discussed, "and therefore I just stepped in. No intrusion, I hope, Mr. Moulder."

"All right," said Moulder; "make yourself at home. There's the stuff on the table. You know what the tap is."

"I've just parted from—Mr. Dockwrath," said Kantwise, speaking in a tone of voice which implied the great importance of the communication, and looking round the table to see the effect of it upon the circle.

"Then you've parted from a very low-lived party, let me tell you that," said Moulder. He had not forgotten Dockwrath's conduct in the commercial room at Leeds and was fully resolved that he never would forgive it.

"That's as may be," said Kantwise. "I say nothing on that subject at the present moment, either one way

or the other. But I think you'll all agree as to this: that at the present moment Mr. Dockwrath fills a conspicuous place in the public eye."

"By no means so conspicuous as John Kenneby," said Mrs. Smiley, "if I may be allowed in my position to hold an opinion."

"That's as may be, Ma'am. I say nothing about that. What I hold by is, that Mr. Dockwrath does hold a conspicuous place in the public eye. I've just parted with him in Gray's Inn Lane, and he says—that it's all up now with Lady Mason."

"Gammon!" said Moulder. And on this occasion Mrs. Smiley did not rebuke him. "What does he know about it more than any one else? Will he bet two to one? Because, if so, I'll take it;—only I must see the money down."

"I don't know what he'll bet, Mr. Moulder; only he says it's all up with her."

"Will he back his side, even handed?"

"I aint a betting man, Mr. Moulder. I don't think it's right. And on such as a matter as this, touching the liberty and almost life of a lady whom I've had the honour of seeing, and acquainted as I am with the lady of the other party, Mrs. Mason that is of Groby Park, I should rather, if it's no offence to you, decline the subject of—betting."

"Bother!"

"Now M., in your own house, you know!" said his wife.

"So it is bother. But never mind that. Go on, Kantwise. What is this you were saying about Dockwrath?"

"Oh, that's about all. I thought you would like to know what they were doing,—particularly Mr. Ken-

neby. I do hear that they mean to be uncommonly hard upon him."

The unfortunate witness shifted uneasily in his seat, but at the moment said nothing himself.

"Well, now, I can't understand it," said Mrs. Smiley, sitting upright in her chair, and tackling herself to the discussion as though she meant to express her opinion, let who might think differently. "How is any one to put words into my mouth if I don't choose to speak them? There's John's waistcoat is silk." Upon which they all looked at Kenneby's waistcoat, and with the exception of Kantwise acknowledged the truth of the assertion.

"That's as may be," said he, looking round at it from the corner of his eyes.

"And do you mean to say that all the barristers in London will make me say that it's made of cloth? It's ridic'lous—nothing short of ridic'lous."

"You've never been tried, my dear," said Moulder. "I don't know about being your dear, Mr. Moulder—"

"Nor yet don't I neither, Mrs. Smiley," said the wife.

"Mr. Kenneby's my dear, and I aint ashamed to own him,—before men and women. But if he allows himself to be hoccusSED in that way, I don't know but what I shall be ashamed. I call it hoccusing—just hoccusing."

"So it is, Ma'am," said Kantwise, "only this, you know, if I hocus you, why you hocus me in return; so it isn't so very unfair, you know."

"Unfair!" said Moulder. "It's the fairest thing that is. It's the bulwark of the British Constitution."

"What, being badgered and browbeat?" asked Kenneby, who was thinking within himself that if this were

so he did not care if he lived somewhere beyond the protection of that blessed Aegis.

"Trial by jury is," said Moulder. "And how can you have trial by jury if the witnesses are not to be cross-questioned?"

To this position no one was at the moment ready to give an answer, and Mr. Moulder enjoyed a triumph over his audience. That he lived in a happy and blessed country Moulder was well aware, and with those blessings he did not wish any one to tamper. "Mother," said a fastidious child to his parent, "the bread is gritty and the butter tastes of turnips." "Turnips indeed,—and gritty!" said the mother. "Is it not a great thing to have bread and butter at all?" I own that my sympathies are with the child. Bread and butter is a great thing; but I would have it of the best if that be possible.

After that Mr. Kantwise was allowed to dilate upon the subject which had brought him there. Mr. Dockwrath had been summoned to Bedford Row, and there had held a council of war together with Mr. Joseph Mason and Mr. Matthew Round. According to his own story Mr. Matthew had quite come round and been forced to acknowledge all that Dockwrath had done for the cause. In Bedford Row there was no doubt whatever as to the verdict. "That woman Bolster is quite clear that she only signed one deed," said Kantwise.

"I shall say nothing—nothing here," said Kenneby.

"Quite right, John," said Mrs. Smiley. "Your feelings on the occasion become you."

"I'll lay an even bet she's acquitted," said Moulder. "And I'll do it in a ten-p'und note."

CHAPTER VIII

WHAT THE FOUR LAWYERS THOUGHT ABOUT IT

I HAVE spoken of the state of public opinion as to Lady Mason's coming trial, and have explained that for the most part men's thoughts and sympathies took part with her. But I cannot say that such was the case with the thoughts of those who were most closely concerned with her in the matter,—whatever may have been their sympathies. Of the state of Mr. Furnival's mind on the matter enough has been said. But if he had still entertained any shadow of doubt as to his client's guilt or innocence, none whatever was entertained either by Mr. Aram or by Mr. Chaffanbrass. From the day on which they had first gone into the real circumstances of the case, looking into the evidence which could be adduced against their client, and looking also to their means of rebutting that evidence, they had never felt a shadow of doubt upon the subject. But yet neither of them had ever said that she was guilty. Aram, in discussing with his clerks the work which it was necessary that they should do in the matter, had never expressed such an opinion; nor had Chaffanbrass done so in the consultations which he had held with Aram. As to the verdict they had very often expressed an opinion,—differing considerably. Mr. Aram was strongly of opinion that Lady Mason would be acquitted, resting that opinion mainly on his great confidence in

the powers of Mr. Chaffanbrass. But Mr. Chaffanbrass would shake his head, and sometimes say that things were not now as they used to be.

"That may be so in the City," said Mr. Aram. "but you won't find a City jury down at Alston."

"It's not the juries, Aram. It's the judges. It usen't to be so, but it is now. When a man has the last word, and will take the trouble to use it, that's everything. If I were asked what point I'd best like to have in my favour, I'd say a deaf judge. Or if not that, one regularly tired out. I've sometimes thought I'd like to be a judge myself, merely to have the last word."

"That wouldn't suit you at all, Mr. Chaffanbrass, for you'd be sick of it in a week."

"At any rate I'm not fit for it," said the great man meekly. "I'll tell you what, Aram, I can look back on life and think that I've done a deal of good in my way. I've prevented unnecessary bloodshed. I've saved the country thousands of pounds in the maintenance of men who've shown themselves well able to maintain themselves. And I've made the Crown lawyers very careful as to what sort of evidence they would send up to the Old Bailey. But my chances of life have been such that they haven't made me fit to be a judge. I know that."

"I wish I might see you on the bench to-morrow;—only that we shouldn't know what to do without you," said the civil attorney. It was no more than the fair every-day flattery of the world, for the practice of Mr. Solomon Aram in his profession was quite as surely attained as was that of Mr. Chaffanbrass. And it could hardly be called flattery, for Mr. Solomon Aram much valued the services of Mr. Chaffanbrass, and greatly appreciated the peculiar turn of that gentleman's mind.

The above conversation took place in Mr. Solomon

Aram's private room in Bucklersbury. In that much-noted city thoroughfare Mr. Aram rented the first floor of a house over an eating establishment. He had no great paraphernalia of books and boxes and clerks' desks, as are apparently necessary to attorneys in general. Three clerks he did employ, who sat in one room, and he himself sat in that behind it. So at least they sat when they were to be found at the parent establishment; but, as regarded the attorney himself and his senior assistant, the work of their lives was carried on chiefly in the courts of law. The room in which Mr. Aram was now sitting was furnished with much more attention to comfort than is usual in lawyers' chambers. Mr. Chaffanbrass was at present lying, with his feet up, on a sofa against the wall, in a position of comfort never attained by him elsewhere till the after-dinner hours had come to him; and Mr. Aram himself filled an easy lounging-chair. Some few law papers there were scattered on the library table, but none of those piles of dusty documents which give to a stranger, on entering an ordinary attorney's room, so terrible an idea of the difficulty and dreariness of the profession. There were no tin boxes with old names labelled on them; there were no piles of letters, and no pigeon-holes loaded with old memoranda. On the whole Mr. Aram's private room was smart and attractive; though, like himself, it had an air rather of pretence than of steady and assured wellbeing.

It is not quite the thing for a barrister to wait upon an attorney, and therefore it must not be supposed that Mr. Chaffanbrass had come to Mr. Aram with any view to immediate business; but nevertheless, as the two men understood each other, they could say what they had to say as to this case of Lady Mason's, although their

present positions were somewhat irregular. They were both to meet Mr. Furnival and Felix Graham on that afternoon in Mr. Furnival's chambers with reference to the division of those labours which were to be commenced at Alston on the day but one following, and they both thought that it might be as well that they should say a word to each other on the subject before they went there.

"I suppose you know nothing about the panel down there, eh?" said Chaffanbrass.

"Well, I have made some inquiries; but I don't think there's anything especial to know;—nothing that matters. If I were you, Mr. Chaffanbrass, I wouldn't have any Hamworth people on the jury, for they say that a prophet is never a prophet in his own country."

"But do you know the Hamworth people?"

"Oh, yes; I can tell you as much as that. But I don't think it will matter much who is or is not on the jury."

"And why not?"

"If those two witnesses break down—that is Kenneby and Bolster, no jury can convict her. And if they don't——"

"Then no jury can acquit her. But let me tell you, Aram, that it's not every man put into a jury-box who can tell whether a witness has broken down or not."

"But from what I hear, Mr. Chaffanbrass, I don't think either of these can stand a chance!—that is, if they both come into your hands."

"But they won't both come into my hands," said the anxious hero of the Old Bailey.

"Ah! that's where it is. There's where we shall fail. Mr. Furnival is a great man, no doubt."

"A very great man,—in his way," said Mr. Chaffanbrass.

"But if he lets one of those two slip through his fingers the thing's over."

"You know my opinion," said Chaffanbrass. "I think it is all over. If you're right in what you say,—that they're both ready to swear in their direct evidence that they only signed one deed on that day, no vacillation afterwards would have any effect on the judge. It's just possible, you know, that their memory might deceive them."

"Possible! I should think so. I'll tell you what, Mr. Chaffanbrass, if the matter was altogether in your hands I should have no fear,—literally no fear."

"Ah, you're partial, Aram."

"It couldn't be so managed, could it, Mr. Chaffanbrass? It would be a great thing; a very great thing." But Mr. Chaffanbrass said that he thought it could not be managed. The success or safety of a client is a very great thing;—in a professional point of view a very great thing indeed. But there is a matter which in legal eyes is greater even than that. Professional etiquette required that the cross-examination of these two most important witnesses should not be left in the hands of the same barrister.

And then the special attributes of Kenneby and Bridget Bolster were discussed between them, and it was manifest that Aram knew with great accuracy the characters of the persons with whom he had to deal. That Kenneby might be made to say almost anything was taken for granted. With him there would be very great scope for that peculiar skill with which Mr. Chaffanbrass was so wonderfully gifted. In the hands of Mr. Chaffanbrass it was not improbable that Kenneby might be made to swear that he had signed two, three, four—any number of documents on that four-

teenth of July, although he had before sworn that he had only signed one. Mr. Chaffanbrass indeed might probably make him say anything that he pleased. Had Kenneby been unsupported the case would have been made safe,—so said Mr. Solomon Aram,—by leaving Kenneby in the hands of Mr. Chaffanbrass. But then Bridget Bolster was supposed to be a witness of altogether a different class of character. To induce her to say exactly the reverse of that which she intended to say might, no doubt, be within the power of man. Mr. Aram thought that it would be within the power of Mr. Chaffanbrass. He thought, however, that it would as certainly be beyond the power of Mr. Furnival; and when the great man lying on the sofa mentioned the name of Mr. Felix Graham, Mr. Aram merely smiled. The question with him was this:—Which would be the safest course?—to make quite sure of Kenneby by leaving him with Chaffanbrass; or to go for the double stake by handing Kenneby over to Mr. Furnival and leaving the task of difficulty to the great master?

“When so much depends upon it, I do detest all this etiquette and precedence,” said Aram with enthusiasm. “In such a case Mr. Furnival ought not to think of himself.”

“My dear Aram,” said Mr. Chaffanbrass, “men always think of themselves first. And if we were to go out of the usual course, do you conceive that the gentlemen on the other side would fail to notice it?”

“Which shall it be then?”

“I’m quite indifferent. If the memory of either of these two persons is doubtful,—and after twenty years it may be so,—Mr. Furnival will discover it.”

“Then on the whole I’m disposed to think that I’d let him take the man.”

"Just as you please, Aram. That is, if he's satisfied also."

"I'm not going to have my client overthrown, you know," said Aram. "And then you'll take Dockwrath also, of course. I don't know that it will have much effect upon the case, but I shall like to see Dockwrath in your hands; I shall indeed."

"I doubt he'll be too many for me."

"Ha, ha, ha!" Aram might well laugh; for when had any one shown himself able to withstand the powers of Mr. Chaffanbrass?

"They say he is a sharp fellow," said Mr. Chaffanbrass. "Well, we must be off. When those gentlemen at the West End get into Parliament it does not do to keep them waiting. Let one of your fellows get a cab." And then the barrister and the attorney started from Bucklersbury for the general meeting of their forces to be held in the Old Square, Lincoln's Inn.

We have heard how it came to pass that Felix Graham had been induced to become one of that legal phalanx which was employed on behalf of Lady Mason. It was now some days since he had left Noningsby, and those days with him had been very busy. He had never yet undertaken the defence of a person in a criminal court, and had much to learn,—or perhaps he rather fancied that he had. And then that affair of Mary Snow's new lover was not found to arrange itself altogether easily. When he came to the details of his dealings with the different parties, every one wanted from him twice as much money as he had expected. The chemist was very willing to have a partner, but then a partnership in his business was, according to his view of the matter, a peculiarly expensive luxury. Snow pere, moreover, came forward with claims which

he rested on such various arguments, that Graham found it almost impossible to resist them. At first,—that is immediately subsequent to the interview between him and his patron described in a preceding chapter, Graham had been visited by a very repulsive attorney who had talked loudly about the cruel wrongs of his ill-used client. This phasis of the affair would have been by far the preferable one; but the attorney and his client probably disagreed. Snow wanted immediate money, and as no immediate money was forthcoming through the attorney, he threw himself repentant at Graham's feet, and took himself off with twenty shillings. But his penitence, and his wants, and his tears, and the thwarted ambition of his parental mind were endless; and poor Felix hardly knew where to turn himself without seeing him. It seemed probable that every denizen of the courts of law in London would be told before long the sad tale of Mary Snow's injuries. And then Mrs. Thomas wanted money,—more money than she had a right to want in accordance with the terms of their mutual agreement. "She had been very much put about," she said,—"dreadfully put about. She had had to change her servant three times. There was no knowing the trouble Mary Snow had given her. She had, in a great measure, been forced to sacrifice her school." Poor woman! she thought she was telling the truth while making these false plaints. She did not mean to be dishonest, but it is so easy to be dishonest without meaning it when one is very poor! Mary Snow herself made no claim on her lost lover, no claim for money or for ought besides. When he parted from her on that day without kissing her, Mary Snow knew that all that was over. But not the less did Graham recognise her claim. The very bonnet which she must

wear when she stood before the altar with Fitzallen must be paid for out of Graham's pocket. That hobby of moulding a young lady is perhaps of all hobbies the most expensive to which a young gentleman can apply himself.

And in these days he heard no word from Noningsby. Augustus Staveley was up in town, and once or twice they saw each other. But, as may easily be imagined, nothing was said between them about Madeline. As Augustus had once declared, a man does not talk to his friend about his own sister. And then hearing nothing—as indeed how could he have heard anything?—Graham endeavoured to assure himself that that was all over. His hopes had ran high at that moment when his last interview with the judge had taken place; but after all to what did that amount? He had never even asked Madeline to love him. He had been such a fool that he had made no use of those opportunities which chance had thrown in his way. He had been told that he might fairly aspire to the hand of any lady. And yet when he had really loved, and the girl whom he had loved had been close to him, he had not dared to speak to her! How could he now expect that she, in his absence, should care for him?

With all these little troubles around him he went to work on Lady Mason's case, and at first felt thoroughly well inclined to give her all the aid in his power. He saw Mr. Furnival on different occasions, and did much to charm that gentleman by his enthusiasm in this matter. Mr. Furnival himself could no longer be as enthusiastic as he had been. The skill of a lawyer he would still give if necessary, but the ardour of the loving friend was waxing colder from day to day. Would it not be better, if such might be possible, that

the whole affair should be given up to the hands of Chaffanbrass who could be energetic without belief, and of Graham, who was energetic because he believed? So he would say to himself frequently. But then he would think again of her pale face and acknowledge that this was impossible. He must go on till the end. But, nevertheless, if this young man could believe, would it not be well that he should bear the brunt of the battle? That fighting of a battle without belief is, I think, the sorriest task which ever falls to the lot of any man.

But, as the day grew nigh, a shadow of disbelief, a dim passing shade—a shade which would pass, and then return, and then pass again—flitted also across the mind of Felix Graham. His theory had been, and still was, that those two witnesses, Kenneby and Bolster, were suborned by Dockwrath to swear falsely. He had commenced by looking at the matter with a full confidence in his client's innocence, a confidence which had come from the outer world, from his social convictions, and the knowledge which he had of the confidence of others. Then it had been necessary for him to reconcile the stories which Kenneby and Bolster were prepared to tell with his strong confidence, and he could only do so by believing that they were both false and had been thus suborned. But what if they were not false? What if he were judging them wrongfully? I do not say that he had ceased to believe in Lady Mason; but a shadow of doubt would occasionally cross his mind, and give to the whole affair an aspect which to him was very tragical.

He had reached Mr. Furnival's chambers on this day some few minutes before his new allies, and as he was seated there discussing the matter which was now so

interesting to them all, he blurted out a question which nearly confounded the elder barrister.

"I suppose there can really be no doubt as to her innocence?"

What was Mr. Furnival to say? Mr. Chaffanbrass and Mr. Aram had asked no such question. Mr. Round had asked no such question when he had discussed the whole matter confidentially with him. It was a sort of question never put to professional men, and one which Felix Graham should not have asked. Nevertheless it must be answered.

"Eh?" he said.

"I suppose we may take it for granted that Lady Mason is really innocent,—that is, free from all falsehood or fraud in this matter!"

"Really innocent! Oh yes; I presume we take that for granted, as a matter of course."

"But you yourself, Mr. Furnival; you have no doubt about it? You have been concerned in this matter from the beginning, and therefore I have no hesitation in asking you."

But that was exactly the reason why he should have hesitated! At least so Mr. Furnival thought. "Who—I? No; I have no doubt; none in the least," said he. And thus the lie which he had been trying to avoid, was at last told.

The assurance thus given was very complete as far as the words were concerned; but there was something in the tone of Mr. Furnival's voice which did not quite satisfy Felix Graham. It was not that he thought that Mr. Furnival had spoken falsely, but the answer had not been made in a manner to set his own mind at rest. Why had not Mr. Furnival answered him with enthusiasm? Why had he not, on behalf of his old friend,

shown something like indignation that any such doubt should have been expressed? His words had been words of assurance; but, considering the subject, his tone had contained no assurance. And thus the shadow of doubt flitted backwards and forwards before Graham's mind.

Then the general meeting of the four lawyers was held, and the various arrangements necessary for the coming contest were settled. No such impudent questions were asked then, nor were there any communications between them of a confidential nature. Mr. Chaffanbrass and Solomon Aram might whisper together, as might also Mr. Furnival and Felix Graham; but there could be no whispering when all the four were assembled. The programme of their battle was settled, and then they parted with the understanding that they were to meet again in the court-house at Alston.

CHAPTER IX

THE EVENING BEFORE THE TRIAL

THE eve of the trial had now come, and still there had been no confidence between the mother and the son. No words of kindness had been spoken with reference to that terrible event which was so near at hand. Lucius had in his manner been courteous to his mother, but he had at the same time been very stern. He had seemed to make no allowance for her sorrows, never saying to her one of those soft words which we all love to hear from those around us when we are suffering. Why should she suffer thus? Had she chosen to lean upon him, he would have borne on her behalf all this trouble and vexation. As to her being guilty—as to her being found guilty by any twelve jurymen in England,—no such idea ever entered his head. I have said that many people had begun to suspect; but no such suspicions had reached his ears. What man, unless it should be some Dockwrath, would whisper to the son the possibility of his mother's guilt? Dockwrath had done more than whisper it; but the words of such a man could have no avail with him against his mother's character.

On that day Mrs. Orme had been with Lady Mason for some hours, and had used all her eloquence to induce the mother even then to divulge her secret to her son. Mrs. Orme had suggested that Sir Peregrine should tell him; she had offered to tell him herself; she

had proposed that Lady Mason should write to Lucius. But all had been of no avail. Lady Mason had argued, and had argued with some truth, that it was too late to tell him now, with the view of obtaining from him support during the trial. If he were now told, he would not recover from the first shock of the blow in time to appear in court without showing on his brow the perturbation of his spirit. His terrible grief would reveal the secret to every one. "When it is over,"—she had whispered at last, as Mrs. Orme continued to press upon her the absolute necessity that Lucius should give up the property,—"when it is over, you shall do it."

With this Mrs. Orme was obliged to rest contented. She had not the heart to remind Lady Mason how probable it was that the truth might be told out to all the world during the next two or three days;—that a verdict of Guilty might make any further telling unnecessary. And indeed it was not needed that she should do so. In this respect Lady Mason was fully aware of the nature of the ground on which she stood.

Mrs. Orme had sat with her the whole afternoon, only leaving herself time to be ready for Sir Peregrine's dinner; and as she left her she promised to be with her early on the following morning to go with her down to the court. Mr. Aram was also to come to the Farm for her, and a closed carriage had been ordered from the inn for the occasion.

"You won't let him prevent you?" were the last words she spoke, as Mrs. Orme then left her.

"He will not wish to do so," said Mrs. Orme. "He has already given me his permission. He never goes back from his word, you know."

This had been said in allusion to Sir Peregrine.

When Mrs. Orme had first proposed to accompany Lady Mason to the court and to sit by her side during the whole trial, he had been much startled. He had been startled, and for a time had been very unwilling to accede to such a step. The place which she now proposed to fill was one which he had intended to fill himself;—but he had intended to stand by an innocent, injured lady, not a perpetrator of midnight forgery. He had intended to support a spotless being, who would then be his wife,—not a woman who for years had lived on the proceeds of fraud and felony, committed by herself!

“Edith,” he had said, “you know that I am unwilling to oppose you; but I think that in this your feelings are carrying you too far.”

“No, father,” she answered, not giving way at all, or showing herself minded to be turned from her purpose by anything he might say. “Do not think so; think of her misery. How could she endure it by herself?”

“Think of her guilt, Edith!”

“I will leave others to think of that. But, father, her guilt will not stain me. Are we not bound to remember what injury she might have done to us, and how we might still have been ignorant of all this, had not she herself confessed it—for our sakes—for our sakes, father?”

And then Sir Peregrine gave way. When this argument was used to him, he was forced to yield. It was true that, had not that woman been as generous as she was guilty, he would now have been bound to share her shame. The whole of this affair, taken together, had nearly laid him prostrate; but that which had gone the farthest towards effecting this ruin was the feel-

ing that he owed so much to Lady Mason. As regarded the outer world, the injury to him would have been much more terrible had he married her; men would then have declared that all was over with him; but as regards the inner man, I doubt whether he would not have borne that better. It was easier for him to sustain an injury than a favour,—than a favour from one whom his judgment compelled him to disown as a friend.

But he had given way, and it was understood at The Cleeve that Mrs. Orme was to remain by Lady Mason's side during the trial. To the general household there was nothing in this that was wonderful. They knew only of the old friendship. To them the question of her guilt was still an open question. As others had begun to doubt so had they; but no one then presumed that Sir Peregrine or Mrs. Orme had any doubt. That they were assured of her innocence was the conviction of all Hamworth and its neighbourhood.

"He never goes back from his word, you know," Mrs. Orme had said; and then she kissed Lady Mason, and went her way. She had never left her without a kiss, had never greeted her without a warm pressure of the hand, since that day on which the secret had been told in Sir Peregrine's library. It would be impossible to describe how great had been the worth of this affection to Lady Mason; but it may almost be said that it had kept her alive. She herself had said but little about it, uttering but few thanks; but not the less had she recognised the value of what had been done for her. She had even become more free herself in her intercourse with Mrs. Orme,—more open in her mode of speech,—had put herself more on an equality with her friend, since there had ceased to be anything hidden

between them. Previously Lady Mason had felt, and had occasionally expressed the feeling, that she was hardly fit to associate on equal terms with Mrs. Orme; but now there was none of this,—now, as they sat together for hours and hours, they spoke, and argued, and lived together as though they were equal. But nevertheless, could she have shown her love by any great deed, there was nothing which Lady Mason would not have done for Mrs. Orme.

She was now left alone, and according to her daily custom would remain there till the servant told her that Mr. Lucius was waiting for her in the dining-room. In an early part of this story I have endeavoured to describe how this woman sat alone, with deep sorrow in her heart and deep thought on her mind, when she first learned what terrible things were coming on her. The idea, however, which the reader will have conceived of her as she sat there will have come to him from the skill of the artist, and not from the words of the writer. If that drawing is now near him, let him go back to it. Lady Mason was again sitting in the same room—that pleasant room, looking out through the verandah on to the sloping lawn, in the same chair, one hand again rested open on the arm of the chair, while the other supported her face as she leaned upon her elbow; and the sorrow was still in her heart, and the deep thought in her mind. But the lines of her face were altered, and the spirit expressed by it was changed. There was less of beauty, less of charm, less of softness; but in spite of all that she had gone through there was more of strength,—more of the power to resist all that this world could do to her.

It would be wrong to say that she was in any degree a hypocrite. A man is no more a hypocrite because

his manner and gait when he is alone are different from those which he assumes in company, than he is for wearing a dressing-gown in the morning, whereas he puts on a black coat in the evening. Lady Mason in the present crisis of her life endeavoured to be true in all her dealings with Mrs. Orme; but nevertheless Mrs. Orme had not yet read her character. As she now sat thinking of what the morrow would bring upon her—thinking of all that the malice of that man Dockwrath had brought upon her,—she resolved that she would still struggle on with a bold front. It had been brought home to her that he, her son, the being for whom her soul had been imperilled, and all her hopes for this world destroyed,—that he must be told of his mother's guilt and shame. Let him be told, and then let him leave her while his anguish and the feeling of his shame were hot upon him. Should she be still a free woman when this trial was over she would move herself away at once, and then let him be told. But still it would be well—well for his sake, that his mother should not be found guilty by the law. It was still worth her while to struggle. The world was very hard to her, bruising her to the very soul at every turn, allowing her no hope, offering to her no drop of cool water in her thirst. But still for him there was some future career; and that career perhaps need not be blotted by the public notice of his mother's guilt. She would still fight against her foes,—still show to that court, and to the world that would then gaze at her, a front on which guilt should not seem to have laid its hideous, defacing hand.

There was much that was wonderful about this woman. While she was with those who regarded her with kindness she could be so soft and womanly; and

then, when alone, she could be so stern and hard! And it may be said that she felt but little pity for herself. Though she recognised the extent of her misery, she did not complain of it. Even in her inmost thoughts her plaint was this,—that he, her son, should be doomed to suffer so deeply for her sin! Sometimes she would utter to that other mother a word of wailing, in that he would not be soft to her; but even in that she did not mean to complain of him. She knew in her heart of hearts that she had no right to expect such softness. She knew that it was better that it should be as it now was. Had he stayed with her from morn till evening, speaking kind words to her, how could she have failed to tell him? In sickness it may irk us because we are not allowed to take the cool drink that would be grateful; but what man in his senses would willingly swallow that by which his very life would be endangered?

It was thus she thought of her son, and what his love might have been to her.

Yes; she would still bear up, as she had borne up at that other trial. She would dress herself with care, and go down into the court with a smooth brow. Men, as they looked at her, should not at once say, "Behold the face of a guilty woman!" There was still a chance in the battle, though the odds were so tremendously against her. It might be that there was but little to which she could look forward, even though the verdict of the jury should be in her favour; but all that she regarded as removed from her by a great interval. She had promised that Lucius should know all after the trial—that he should know all, so that the property might be restored to its rightful owner; and she was fully resolved that this promise should be kept. But

nevertheless there was a long interval. If she could battle through this first danger,—if by the skill of her lawyers she could avert the public declaration of her guilt, might not the chances of war still take some further turn in her favour? And thus, though her face was pale with suffering and thin with care, though she had realised the fact that nothing short of a miracle could save her,—still she would hope for that miracle.

But the absolute bodily labour which she was forced to endure was so hard upon her! She would dress herself, and smooth her brow for the trial; but that dressing herself, and that maintenance of a smooth brow would impose upon her an amount of toil which would almost overtask her physical strength. Oh reader, have you ever known what it is to rouse yourself and go out to the world on your daily business, when all the inner man has revolted against work, when a day of rest has seemed to you to be worth a year of life? If she could have rested now, it would have been worth many years of life,—worth all her life. She longed for rest,—to be able to lay aside the terrible fatigue of being ever on the watch. From the burden of that necessity she had never been free since her crime had been first committed. She had never known true rest. She had not once trusted herself to sleep without the feeling that her first waking thought would be one of horror, as the remembrance of her position came upon her. In every word she spoke, in every trifling action of her life, it was necessary that she should ask herself how that word and action might tell upon her chances of escape. She had striven to be true and honest,—true and honest with the exception of that one deed. But that one deed had communicated its poison to her whole life. Truth, and honesty—fair unblemished truth and

open-handed, fearless honesty,—had been impossible to her. Before she could be true and honest it would be necessary that she should go back and cleanse herself from the poison of that deed. Such cleansing is to be done. Men have sinned deep as she had sinned, and, lepers though they have been, they have afterwards been clean. But that task of cleansing oneself is not an easy one;—the waters of that Jordan in which it is needful to wash are scalding hot. The cool neighbouring streams of life's pleasant valleys will by no means suffice.

Since she had been home at Orley Farm she had been very scrupulous as to going down into the parlour both at breakfast and at dinner, so that she might take her meals with her son. She had not as yet omitted this on one occasion, although sometimes the task of sitting through the dinner was very severe upon her. On the present occasion, the last day that remained to her before the trial—perhaps the last evening on which she would ever watch the sun set from those windows, she thought that she could spare herself. “Tell Mr. Lucius,” she said to the servant who came to summon her, “that I would be obliged to him if he would sit down without me. Tell him that I am not ill, but that I would rather not go down to dinner!” But before the girl was on the stairs she had changed her mind. Why should she now ask for this mercy? What did it matter? So she gathered herself up from the chair, and going forth from the room, stopped the message before it was delivered. She would bear on to the end.

She sat through the dinner, and answered the ordinary questions which Lucius put to her with her ordinary voice, and then, as was her custom, she kissed

his brow as she left the room. It must be remembered that they were still mother and son, and that there had been no quarrel between them. And now, as she went up stairs, he followed her into the drawing-room. His custom had been to remain below, and though he had usually seen her again during the evening, there had seldom or never been any social intercourse between them. On the present occasion, however, he followed her, and closing the door for her as he entered the room, he sat himself down on the sofa, close to her chair.

"Mother," he said, putting out his hand and touching her arm, "things between us are not as they should be."

She shuddered, not at the touch, but at the words. Things were not as they should be between them. "No," she said. "But I am sure of this, Lucius, that you never had an unkind thought in your heart towards me."

"Never, mother. How could I,—to my own mother, who has ever been so good to me? But for the last three months we have been to each other nearly as though we were strangers."

"But we have loved each other all the same," said she.

"But love should beget close social intimacy, and above all close confidence in times of sorrow. There has been none such between us."

What could she say to him? It was on her lips to promise him that such love should again prevail between them as soon as this trial should be over; but the words stuck in her throat. She did not dare to give him so false an assurance. "Dear Lucius," she said, "if it has been my fault, I have suffered for it."

"I do not say that it is your fault;—nor will I say

that it has been my own. If I have seemed harsh to you, I beg your pardon."

"No, Lucius, no; you have not been harsh. I have understood you through it all."

"I have been grieved because you did not seem to trust me;—but let that pass now. Mother I wish that there may be no unpleasant feeling between us when you enter on this ordeal to-morrow."

"There is none;—there shall be none."

"No one can feel more keenly,—no one can feel so keenly as I do, the cruelty with which you are treated. The sight of your sorrow has made me wretched."

"Oh, Lucius!"

"I know how pure and innocent you are——"

"No, Lucius, no."

"But I say yes; and knowing that, it has cut me to the quick to see them going about a defence of your innocence by quips and quibbles, as though they were struggling for the escape of a criminal."

"Lucius!" And she put her hands up, praying for mercy, though she could not explain to him how terribly severe were his words.

"Wait a moment, mother. To me such men as Mr. Chaffanbrass and his comrades are odious. I will not, and do not believe that their services are necessary to you——"

"But, Lucius, Mr. Furnival——"

"Yes; Mr. Furnival! It is he that has done it all. In my heart I wish that you had never known Mr. Furnival;—never known him as a lawyer that is," he added, thinking of his own strong love for the lawyer's daughter."

"Do not upbraid me now, Lucius. Wait till it is all over."

"Upbraid you! No. I have come to you now that we may be friends. As things have gone so far, this plan of defence must of course be carried on. I will say no more about that. But, mother, I will go into the court with you to-morrow. That support I can at any rate give you, and they shall see that there is no quarrel between us."

But Lady Mason did not desire this. She would have wished that he might have been miles away from the court had that been possible. "Mrs. Orme is to be with me," she said.

Then again there came a black frown upon his brow,—a frown such as there had often been there of late. "And will Mrs. Orme's presence make the attendance of your own son improper?"

"Oh, no; of course not. I did not mean that, Lucius."

"Do you not like to have me near you?" he asked; and as he spoke he rose up, and took her hand as he stood before her.

She gazed for a moment into his face while the tears streamed down from her eyes, and then rising from her chair, she threw herself on to his bosom and clasped him in her arms. "My boy! my boy!" she said. "Oh, if you could be near me, and away from this—away from this!"

She had not intended thus to give way, but the temptation had been too strong for her. When she had seen Mrs. Orme and Peregrine together,—when she had heard Peregrine's mother, with words expressed in a joyful tone, affect to complain of the inroads which her son made upon her, she had envied her that joy. "Oh, if it could be so with me also!" she always thought; and the words too had more than once been

spoken. Now at last, in this last moment, as it might be, of her life at home, he had come to her with kindly voice, and she could not repress her yearning.

"Lucius," she said; "dearest Lucius! my own boy!" And then the tears from her eyes streamed hot on to his bosom.

"Mother," he said, "it shall be so. I will be with you."

But she was now thinking of more than this—of much more. Was it possible for her to tell him now? As she held him in her arms, hiding her face upon his breast, she struggled hard to speak the word. Then in the midst of that struggle, while there was still something like a hope within her that it might be done, she raised her head and looked up into his face. It was not a face pleasant to look at, as was that of Peregrine Orme. It was hard in its outlines, and perhaps too manly for his age. But she was his mother, and she loved it well. She looked up at it, and raising her hands she stroked his cheeks. She then kissed him again and again, with warm, clinging kisses. She clung to him, holding him close to her, while the sobs which she had so long repressed came forth from her with a violence that terrified him. Then again she looked up into his face with one long wishful gaze; and after that she sank upon the sofa and hid her face within her hands. She had made the struggle, but it had been of no avail. She could not tell him that tale with her own voice.

"Mother," he said, "what does this mean? I cannot understand such grief as this." But for a while she was quite unable to answer. The flood-gates were at length opened, and she could not restrain the torrent of her sobs.

"You do not understand how weak a woman can be," she said at last.

But in truth he understood nothing of a woman's strength. He sat down by her, now and then taking her by the hand when she would leave it to him, and in his way endeavoured to comfort her. All comfort, we may say, was out of the question; but by degrees she again became tranquil. "It shall be to-morrow as you will have it. You will not object to her being with me also?"

He did object, but he could not say so. He would have much preferred to be the only friend near to her, but he felt that he could not deny her the solace of a woman's aid and a woman's countenance. "Oh, no," he said, "if you wish it." He would have found it impossible to define even to himself the reason for his dislike to any assistance coming from the family of the Ormes; but the feeling was there, strong within his bosom.

"And when this is over, mother, we will go away," he said. "If you would wish to live elsewhere, I will sell the property. It will be better perhaps after all that has passed. We will go abroad for a while."

She could make no answer to this except pressing his hand. Ah, if he had been told—if she had allowed Mrs. Orme to do that kindness for her, how much better for her would it now have been? Still the property! Ah, me! Were they not words of fearful sound in her ears,—words of terrible import?

"Yes, it shall be so," she said, putting aside that last proposition of his. "We will go together to-morrow. Mr. Aram said that he would sit at my side, but he cannot object to your being there between us." Mr. Aram's name was odious to Lucius Mason. His close

presence would be odious to him. But he felt that he could urge nothing against an arrangement that had now become necessary. Mr. Aram, with all his quibbles, had been engaged, and the trial must now be carried through with all the Aram tactics.

After that Lucius left his mother, and took himself out into the dark night, walking up and down on the road between his house and the outer gate, endeavouring to understand why his mother should be so despondent. That she must fear the result of the trial, he thought, was certain, but he could not bring himself to have any such fear. As to any suspicion of her guilt,—no such idea had even for one moment cast a shadow upon his peace of mind.

CHAPTER X

THE FIRST JOURNEY TO ALSTON

AT that time Sir Richard Leatherham was the solicitor-general, and he had been retained as leading counsel for the prosecution. It was quite understood by all men who did understand what was going on in the world, that this trial had been in truth instituted by Mr. Mason of Groby with the hope of recovering the property which had been left away from him by his father's will. The whole matter had now been so much discussed, that the true bearings of it were publicly known. If on the former trial Lady Mason had sworn falsely, then there could be no doubt that that will, or the codicil to the will, was an untrue document, and the property would in that case revert to Mr. Mason, after such further legal exercitations on the subject as the lawyers might find necessary and profitable. As far as the public were concerned, and as far as the Masons were concerned, it was known and acknowledged that this was another struggle on the part of the Groby Park family to regain the Orley Farm Estate. But then the question had become much more interesting than it had been in the days of the old trial, through the allegation which was now made of Lady Mason's guilt. Had the matter gone against her in the former trial, her child would have lost the property, and that would have been all. But the present issue would be very different. It would be much more tragical, and therefore of much deeper interest.

As Alston was so near to London, Sir Richard, Mr. Furnival, Mr. Chaffanbrass, and others, were able to go up and down by train,—which arrangement was at ordinary assizes a great heartsore to the hotel-keepers and owners of lodging-houses in Alston. But on this occasion the town was quite full in spite of this facility. The attorneys did not feel it safe to run up and down in that way, nor did the witnesses. Mr. Aram remained, as did also Mr. Mat. Round. Special accommodation had been provided for John Kenneby and Bridget Bolster, and Mr. Mason of Groby had lodgings of his own.

Mr. Mason of Groby had suggested to the attorneys in Bedford Row that his services as a witness would probably be required, but they had seemed to think otherwise. "We shall not call you," Mr. Round had said, "and I do not suppose that the other side will do so. They can't if they do not first serve you." But in spite of this Mr. Mason had determined to be at Alston. If it were true that this woman had robbed him;—if it could be proved that she had really forged a will, and then by crime of the deepest dye taken from him for years that which was his own, should he not be there to see? Should he not be a witness to her disgrace? Should he not be the first to know and feel his own tardy triumph? Pity! Pity for her! When such a word was named to him, it seemed to him as though the speaker were becoming to a certain extent a partner in her guilt. Pity! Yes; such pity as an Englishman who had caught the Nana Sahib might have felt for his victim. He had complained twenty times since this matter had been mooted of the folly of those who had altered the old laws. That folly had probably robbed him of his property for twenty years, and would now rob

him of half of his revenge. Not that he ever spoke even to himself of revenge. "Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord." He would have been as able as any man to quote the words, and as willing. Justice, outraged justice, was his theme. Whom had he ever robbed? To whom had he not paid all that was owing? "All that I have done from my youth upwards." Such were his thoughts of himself; and with such thoughts was it possible that he should willingly be absent from Alston during such a trial?

"I really would stay away if I were you," Mat. Round had said to him.

"I will not stay away," he had replied, with a look black as a thundercloud. Could there really be anything in those suspicions of Dockwrath, that his own lawyer had wilfully thrown him over once, and was now anxious to throw him over again? "I will not stay away," he said; and Dockwrath secured his lodgings for him. About this time he was a good deal with Mr. Dockwrath, and almost regretted that he had not followed that gentleman's advice at the commencement of the trial, and placed the management of the whole concern in his hands.

Thus Alston was quite alive on the morning of the trial, and the doors of the court-house were thronged long before they were opened. They who were personally concerned in the matter, whose presence during the ceremony would be necessary, or who had legal connection with the matter in hand, were of course not driven to this tedious manner of obtaining places. Mr. Dockwrath, for instance, did not stand waiting at the door, nor did his friend Mr. Mason. Mr. Dockwrath was a great man as far as this day was concerned, and could command admittance from the door-

keepers and others about the court. But for the outer world, for men and women who were not lucky enough to be lawyers, witnesses, jurymen, or high sheriffs, there was no means of hearing and seeing the events of this stirring day except what might be obtained by exercise of an almost unlimited patience.

There had been much doubt as to what arrangement for her attendance at the court it might be best for Lady Mason to make, and some difficulty too as to who should decide as to these arrangements. Mr. Aram had been down more than once, and had given a hint that it would be well that something should be settled. It had ended in his settling it himself,—he, with the assistance of Mrs. Orme. What would Sir Peregrine have said had he known that on any subject these two had been leagued in council together?

"She can go from hence in a carriage—a carriage from the inn," Mrs. Orme had said.

"Certainly, certainly; a carriage from the inn; yes. But in the evening, Ma'am?"

"When the trial is over?" said Mrs. Orme, inquiring from him his meaning.

"We can hardly expect that it shall be over in one day, Ma'am. She will continue to be on bail, and can return home. I will see that she is not annoyed as she leaves the town."

"Annoyed?" said Mrs. Orme.

"By the people I mean."

"Will there be anything of that, Sir?" she asked, turning pale at the idea. "I shall be with her, you know."

"Through the whole affair, Ma'am?"

"Yes, through the whole affair."

"They'll want to have a look at her of course; but,

—Mrs. Orme, we'll see that you are not annoyed. Yes; she had better come back home the first day. The expense won't be much; will it?"

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Orme. "I must return home, you know. How many days will it be, Sir?"

"Well, perhaps two,—perhaps three. It may run on all the week. Of course you know, Mrs. Orme——"

"Know what?" she asked.

"When the trial is over, if—if it should go against us,—then you must return alone."

And so the matter had been settled, and Mr. Aram himself had ordered the carriage from the inn. Sir Peregrine's carriage would have been at their disposal, —or rather Mrs. Orme's own carriage; but she had felt that The Cleeve arms on The Cleeve panels would be out of place in the streets of Hamworth on such an occasion. It would of course be impossible that she should not be recognised in the court, but she would do as little as possible to proclaim her own presence.

When the morning came, the very morning of the terrible day, Mrs. Orme came down early from her room, as it was necessary that she should breakfast two hours before the usual time. She had said nothing of this to Sir Peregrine, hoping that she might have been able to escape in the morning without seeing him. She had told her son to be there; but when she made her appearance in the breakfast parlour, she found that his grandfather was already with him. She sat down and took her cup of tea almost in silence, for they all felt that on such a morning much speech was impossible for them.

"Edith, my dear," said the baronet, "you had better eat something. Think of the day that is before you."

"Yes, father, I have," said she, and she lifted a morsel of bread to her mouth.

"You must take something with you," said he, "or you will be faint in the court. Have you thought how many hours you will be there?"

"I will see to that," said Peregrine, speaking with a stern decision in his voice that was by no means natural to him.

"Will you be there, Perry?" said his mother.

"Of course I shall. I will see that you have what you want. You will find that I will be near you."

"But how will you get in, my boy?" asked his grandfather.

"Let me alone for that. I have spoken to the sheriff already. There is no knowing what may turn up; so if anything does turn up you may be sure that I am near you."

Then another slight attempt at eating was made, the cup of tea was emptied, and the breakfast was finished. "Is the carriage there, Perry?" asked Mrs. Orme.

"Yes; it is at the door."

"Good-bye, father; I am sorry to have disturbed you."

"Good-bye, Edith; God bless you, and give you strength to bear it. And, Edith——"

"Sir?" and she held his hand as he whispered to her.

"Say to her a word of kindness from me;—a word of kindness. Tell her that I have forgiven her, but tell her also that man's forgiveness will avail her nothing."

"Yes, father, I will."

"Teach her where to look for pardon. But tell her all the same that I have forgiven her."

And then he handed her into the carriage. Peregrine, as he stood aside, had watched them as they whispered, and to his mind also as he followed them to the carriage a suspicion of what the truth might be now made its way. Surely there would be no need of all this solemn mourning if she were innocent. Had she been esteemed as innocent, Sir Peregrine was not the man to believe that any jury of his countrymen could find her guilty. Had this been the reason for that sudden change,—for that breaking off of the intended marriage? Even Peregrine, as he went down the steps after his mother, had begun to suspect the truth; and we may say that he was the last within all that household who did so. During the last week every servant at The Cleve had whispered to her fellow-servant that Lady Mason had forged the will.

"I shall be near you, mother," said Peregrine as he put his head into the carriage; "remember that. The judge and the other fellows will go out in the middle of the day to get a glass of wine: I'll have something for both of you near the court."

Poor Mrs. Orme as she pressed her son's hand felt much relieved by the assurance. It was not that she feared anything, but she was going to a place that was absolutely new to her,—to a place in which the eyes of many would be fixed on her,—to a place in which the eyes of all would be fixed on the companion with whom she would be joined. Her heart almost sank within her as the carriage drove away. She would be alone till she reached Orley Farm, and there she would take up not only Lady Mason, but Mr. Aram also. How would it be with them in that small carriage while Mr. Aram was sitting opposite to them? Mrs. Orme by no means regretted this act of kindness which she was doing, but

she began to feel that the task was not a light one. As to Mr. Aram's presence in the carriage, she need have been under no uneasiness. He understood very well when his presence was desirable, and also when it was not desirable.

When she arrived at the door of Orley Farm house she found Mr. Aram waiting there to receive her. "I am sorry to say," said he, raising his hat, "that Lady Mason's son is to accompany us."

"She did not tell me," said Mrs. Orme, not understanding why this should make him sorry.

"It was arranged between them last night, and it is very unfortunate. I cannot explain this to her; but perhaps——"

"Why is it unfortunate, Sir?"

"Things will be said which—which—which would drive me mad if they were said about my mother." And immediately there was a touch of sympathy between the high-bred lady and the Old Bailey Jew lawyer.

"Yes, yes," said Mrs. Orme. "It will be dreadful."

"And then if they find her guilty! It may be so you know. And how is he to sit there and hear the judge's charge;—and then the verdict, and the sentence? If he is there he cannot escape. I'll tell you what, Mrs. Orme; he should not be there at all."

But what could she do? Had it been possible that she should be an hour alone with Lady Mason, she would have explained all this to her,—or if not all, would have explained much of it. But now, with no minutes to spare, how could she make this understood? "But all that will not come to-day, will it, Sir?"

"Not all,—not the charge or the verdict. But he should not be there even to-day. He should have gone

away; or if he remained at home, he should not have shown himself out of the house."

But this was too late now, for as they were still speaking Lady Mason appeared at the door, leaning on her son's arm. She was dressed from head to foot in black, and over her face there was a thick black veil.

Mr. Aram spoke no word further as she stepped up the steps from the hall door to the carriage, but stood back, holding the carriage-door open in his hand. Lucius merely bowed to Mrs. Orme as he assisted his mother to take her place; and then following her, he sat himself down in silence opposite to them. Mr. Aram, who had carefully arranged his own programme, shut the door, and mounted on to the box beside the driver.

Mrs. Orme had held out her own hand, and Lady Mason having taken it, still held it after she was seated. Then they started, and for the first mile no word was spoken between them. Mrs. Orme was most anxious to speak, if it might only be for the sake of breaking the horrid stillness of their greeting; but she could think of no word which it would be proper on such an occasion to say, either to Lucius or even before him. Had she been alone with Lady Mason there would have been enough of words that she could have spoken. Sir Peregrine's message was as a burden upon her tongue till she could deliver it; but she could not deliver it while Lucius Mason was sitting by her.

Lady Mason herself was the first to speak. "I did not know yesterday that Lucius would come," she said, "or I should have told you."

"I hope it does not inconvenience you," he said.

"Oh no; by no means."

"I could not let my mother go out without me on

such an occasion as this. But I am grateful to you, Mrs. Orme, for coming also."

"I thought it would be better for her to have some lady with her," said Mrs. Orme.

"Oh yes, it is better—much better." And then no further word was spoken by any of them till the carriage drove up to the court-house door. It may be hoped that the journey was less painful to Mr. Aram than to the others, seeing that he solaced himself on the coach-box with a cigar.

There was still a great crowd round the front of the court-house when they reached it, although the doors were open, and the court was already sitting. It had been arranged that this case—the great case of the assize—should come on first on this day, most of the criminal business having been completed on that preceding; and Mr. Aram had promised that his charge should be forthcoming exactly at ten o'clock. Exactly at ten the carriage was driven up to the door, and Mr. Aram jumping from his seat directed certain policemen and sheriff's servants to make a way for the ladies up to the door, and through the hall of the court-house. Had he lived in Alston all his life, and spent ~~his~~ days in the purlieus of that court, he could not have been more at home or have been more promptly obeyed.

"And now I think we may go in," he said, opening the door and letting down the steps with his own hands.

At first he took them into a small room within the building, and then hustled away himself into the court. "I shall be back in half a minute," he said; and in half a dozen minutes he was back. "We are all ready now, and shall have no trouble about our places. If you have anything to leave,—shawls, or things of that sort,—they will be quite safe here: Mrs. Hitcham will look

after them." And then an old woman who had followed Mr. Aram into the room on the last occasion curtseyed to them. But they had nothing to leave, and their little procession was soon made.

Lucius at first offered his arm to his mother, and she had taken it till she had gone through the door into the hall. Mr. Aram also had, with some hesitation, offered his arm to Mrs. Orme; but she in spite of that touch of sympathy, had managed, without speaking, to decline it. In the hall, however, when all the crowd of gazers had turned their eyes upon them and were only kept off from pressing on them by the policemen and sheriff's officers, Lady Mason remembered herself, and suddenly dropping her son's arm, she put out her hand for Mrs. Orme, Mr. Aram was now in front of them, and thus they two followed him into the body of the court. The veils of both of them were down; but Mrs. Orme's veil was not more than ordinarily thick, and she could see everything that was around her. So they walked up through the crowded way and Lucius followed them by himself.

They were very soon in their seats, the crowd offering them no impediment. The judge was already on the bench,—not our old acquaintance Justice Staveley, but his friend and colleague Baron Maltby. Judge Staveley was sitting in the other court. Mrs. Orme and Lady Mason soon found themselves seated on a bench, with a slight standing desk before them, much as though they were seated in a narrow pew. Up above them, on the same seat, were the three barristers employed on Lady Mason's behalf; nearest to the judge was Mr. Furnival; then came Felix Graham, and below him sat Mr. Chaffanbrass, somewhat out of the line of precedence, in order that he might more easily avail

himself of the services of Mr. Aram. Lucius found himself placed next to Mr. Chaffanbrass, and his mother sat between him and Mrs. Orme. On the bench below them, immediately facing a large table which was placed in the centre of the court, sat Mr. Aram and his clerk.

Mrs. Orme as she took her seat was so confused that she could hardly look around her; and it may be imagined that Lady Mason must have suffered at any rate as much in the same way. But they who were looking at her—and it may be said that every one in the court was looking at her—were surprised to see that she raised her veil as soon as she was seated. She raised her veil, and never lowered it again till she left the court, and repassed out into the hall. She had thought much of this day,—even of the little incidents which would occur,—and she was aware that her identification would be necessary. Nobody should tell her to unveil herself, nor would she let it be thought that she was afraid to face her enemies. So there she sat during the whole day, bearing the gaze of the court.

She had dressed herself with great care. It may be said of most women who could be found in such a situation, that they would either give no special heed to their dress on such a morning, or that they would appear in garments of sorrow studiously unbecoming and lachrymose, or that they would attempt to outface the world, and have appeared there in bright trappings, fit for happier days. But Lady Mason had dressed herself after none of these fashions. Never had her clothes been better made, or worn with a better grace; but they were all black from her bonnet-ribbon down to her boot, and were put on without any attempt at finery or smartness. As regards dress, she had never looked

better than she did now; and Mr. Furnival, when his eye caught her as she turned her head round towards the judge, was startled by the grace of her appearance. Her face was very pale, and somewhat hard; but no one on looking at it could say that it was the countenance of a woman overcome either by sorrow or by crime. She was perfect mistress of herself, and as she looked round the court, not with defiant gaze, but with eyes half raised, and a look of modest but yet conscious intelligence, those around her hardly dared to think that she could be guilty.

As she thus looked her gaze fell on one face that she had not seen for years, and their eyes met. It was the face of Joseph Mason of Groby, who sat opposite to her; and as she looked at him her own countenance did not quail for a moment. Her own countenance did not quail; but his eyes fell gradually down, and when he raised them again she had averted her face.

CHAPTER XI

FELIX GRAHAM RETURNS TO NONINGSBY

"If you love the man let him come." It was thus that the judge had declared to his daughter his opinion of what had better be done in that matter of Felix Graham. Then he had gone on to declare that he had given his permission to Felix Graham to say anything that he had got to say, and finally had undertaken to invite Felix Graham to spend the assize week at Noningsby. Of course, in the mind of the judge all this amounted to an actual giving away of his daughter. He regarded the thing now as done, looking upon the young people as betrothed, and his reflections mainly ran on the material part of the business. How should Graham be made to earn an income, and what allowance must be made to him till he did so? There was a certain sum set apart for Madeline's fortune, but that would by no means suffice for the livelihood of a married barrister in London. Graham no doubt earned something as it was, but that was done by his pen rather than by his wig, and the judge was inclined to think that the pen must be abandoned before the wig could be made profitable. Such were the directions which his thoughts took regarding Madeline's lot in life. With him the next week or two with their events did not signify much; whereas the coming years did signify a great deal.

At that time, on that Sunday afternoon, there still remained to Madeline the best part of a month to

think of it all, before Felix should reappear upon the scene. But then she could not think of it by herself in silence. Her father had desired her to tell her mother what had passed, and she felt that a great difficulty still lay before her. She knew that her mother did not wish her to marry Felix Graham. She knew that her mother did wish her to marry Peregrine Orme. And therefore though no mother and child had ever treated each other with a sweeter confidence, or loved each other with warmer hearts, there was as it were a matter of disunion between them. But nevertheless she must tell her mother, and the dread of this telling weighed heavy upon her as she sat that night in the drawing-room reading the article which Felix had written.

But she need not have been under any alarm. Her father, when he told her to discuss the matter with her mother, had by no means intended to throw on her shoulders the burden of converting Lady Staveley to the Graham interest. He took care to do this himself effectually, so that in fact there should be no burden left for Madeline's shoulders. "Well, my dear," he said that same Sunday evening to his wife, "I have had it all out with Madeline this afternoon."

"About Mr. Graham, do you mean?"

"Yes; about Mr. Graham. I have promised that he shall come here for the assize week."

"Oh dear!"

"It's done, my love, and I believe we shall find it all for the best. The bishops' daughters always marry clergymen, and the judges' daughters ought to marry lawyers."

"But you can't give him a practice. The bishops have livings to give away."

"Perhaps I may show him how to make a practice for himself, which would be better. Take my word for it that it will be best for her happiness. You would not have liked to be disappointed yourself, when you made up your mind to be married."

"No, I should not," said Lady Staveley.

"And she will have a will of her own quite as strong as you had." And then there was silence in the room for some time.

"You'll be kind to him when he comes?" said the judge.

"Oh, yes," said Lady Staveley, in a voice that was by no means devoid of melancholy.

"Nobody can be so kind as you when you please. And as it is to be——"

"I always did like him," said Lady Staveley, "although he is so very plain."

"You'll soon get used to that, my dear."

"And as for poor Mr. Orme——"

"As for poor young Mr. Orme, as you call him, he will not die of a broken heart. Poor young Mr. Orme has all the world before him and will soon console himself."

"But he is so attached to her. And then The Cleeve is so near."

"We must give up all that, my dear."

"Very well," said Lady Staveley; and from that moment it may be said that she had given in her adhesion to the Graham connection. When some time after she gave her orders to Baker as to preparing a room for Mr. Graham, it was made quite clear to that excellent woman by her mistress's manner and anxiety as to the airing of the sheets, that Miss Madeline was to have her own way in the matter.

But long previous to these preparations Madeline and her mother had discussed the matter fully. "Papa says that Mr. Graham is to come here for the assize week," said Lady Staveley.

"Yes; so he told me," Madeline replied very bashfully.

"I suppose it's all for the best."

"I hope it is," said Madeline. What could she do but hope so?

"Yes papa understands everything so very well that I am sure he would not let him come if it were not proper."

"I suppose not," said Madeline.

"And now I look upon the matter as all settled."

"What matter, mamma?"

"That he—that he is to come here as your lover."

"Oh, no, mamma. Pray don't imagine that. It is not so at all. What should I do if you were to say anything to make him think so?"

"But you told me that you loved him."

"So I do, mamma."

"And he told your papa that he was desperately in love with you."

"I don't know, mamma."

"But he did;—your papa told me so, and that's why he asked him to come down here again. He never would have done it without."

Madeline had her own idea about this, believing that her father had thought more of her wants in the matter than he had of those of Felix Graham; but as to this she said nothing. "Nevertheless, mamma, you must not say that to any one," she answered. "Mr. Graham has never spoken to me,—not a word. I should of course have told you had he done so."

"Yes, I am sure of that. But, Madeline, I suppose it's all the same. He asked papa for permission to speak to you, and your papa has given it."

"I'm sure I don't know, mamma."

It was a quarter of an hour after that when Lady Staveley again returned to the subject. "I am sure Mr. Graham is very clever and all that."

"Papa says that he is very clever indeed."

"I'm quite sure he is, and he makes himself very nice in the house, always talking when there are people to dinner. Mr. Arbuthnot never will talk when there are people to dinner. But Mr. Arbuthnot has got a very nice place in Warwickshire, and they say he'll come in for the county some day."

"Of course, mamma, if there should be anything of that sort, we should not be rich people, like Isabella and Mr. Arbuthnot."

"Not at first, dear."

"Neither first nor last. But I don't care about that. If you and papa will like him, and—and—if it should come to that!—Oh, mamma, he is so good, and so clever, and he understands things, and talks about things as though he knew how to make himself master of them. And he is honest and proud. Oh, mamma, if it should be so, I do hope you will love him."

And then Lady Staveley promised that she would love him, thinking nevertheless that had things gone differently she would have extended a more motherly warmth of affection to Peregrine Orme.

And about this time Peregrine Orme made another visit to Noningsby. His intention was to see the judge, explaining what steps his grandfather had taken as to The Cleeve property, and then once more to have thrown himself at Madeline's feet. But cir-

cumstances as they turned out prevented this. Although he had been at some trouble to ascertain when the judge would be at Noningsby, nevertheless, on his arrival, the judge was out. He would be home, the servant said, to dinner, but not before; and therefore he had again seen Lady Staveley, and after seeing her had not thrown himself at Madeline's feet.

He had made up his mind to give a systematic and detailed account of his pecuniary circumstances, and had selected nearly the very words in which this should be made, not actuated by any idea that such a process would have any weight with Madeline, or by any means assist him with her, but hoping that he might thus procure the judge's permission to press his suit. But all his preparation and all his chosen words were of no use to him. When he saw Lady Staveley's face he at once knew that she had no comfort to offer him. "Well," he said; "is there any chance for me?" He had intended to speak in a very different tone, but words which have been prepared seldom manage to fit themselves into their appropriate places.

"Oh, Mr. Orme," she said, taking him by the hand, and holding it. "I wish it were different; I wish it could be different."

"There is no hope then?" And as he spoke there was a sound in his voice as though the tidings would utterly unman him.

"I should be wicked to deceive you," she said. "There is no hope." And then as she looked up at the sorrow so plainly written in the lines of his young, handsome face, tears came into her eyes and rolled down her cheeks. How could it be that a daughter of hers should be indifferent to the love of such a suitor as this?

But Peregrine, when he saw her sorrow, repressed his own. "Very well," said he; "I will at any rate know how to take an answer. And for your kindness to me in the matter I am much obliged. I ought to have known myself better than to have supposed she could have cared for me."

"I am sure she feels that you have done her great honour."

"Psha! honour! But never mind—good-bye, Lady Staveley."

"Will you not see her?"

"No. Why should I see her? Give her my love—my best love—"

"I will—I will."

"And tell her that I hope she may be happy, and make some fellow happy who is more fortunate than I am. I shall get out of the way somewhere, so that I shall not make a fool of myself when I see it. And then he took his departure and rode back again to The Cleeve. This happened two days before the commencement of the trial, and the day before that on which Graham was to arrive at Noningsby.

When Graham received the judge's note asking him to put up at Noningsby for the assize week, he was much astonished. It was very short.

"DEAR GRAHAM,

"As you are coming down to Alston, special in Lady Mason's case, you may as well come and stay here. Lady Staveley bids me say that she will be delighted. Your elder brethren will no doubt go back to London each night, so that you will not be expected to remain with them.

"Yours always, &c."

What could be the intention of the judge in taking so strange a step as this? The judge had undertaken to see him in three months, having given him some faint idea that there then might be a chance of hope. But now, before one month was over, he was actually sending for him to the house, and inviting him to stay there. What would all the bar world say when they found that a young barrister was living at the judge's house during the assizes? Would it not be in every man's mouth that he was a suitor accepted both by the judge's daughter and by the judge? There would be nothing in that to go against the grain with him, if only the fact were so. That the fact should be so he could not venture to hope even on this hint; but he accepted the judge's invitation, sent his grateful thanks to Lady Staveley;—as to Lady Staveley's delight he was sure that the judge must have romanced a little, for he had clearly recognised Lady Staveley as his enemy;—and then he prepared himself for the chances of war.

On the evening before the trial he arrived at Noningsby just in time for dinner. He had been obliged to remain an hour or two at Alston in conference with Mr. Aram, and was later than he had expected he would be. He had been afraid to come early in the day, lest by doing so he might have seemed to overstep the margin of his invitation. When he did arrive, the two ladies were already dressing, and he found the judge in the hall.

"A pretty fellow you are," said the judge. "It's dinner-time already and of course you take an hour to dress."

"Mr. Aram——" began Felix.

"Oh, yes, Mr. Aram! I'll give you fifteen minutes, but not a moment more." And so Felix was hurried on

up to his bed-room—the old bed room in which he had passed so many hours, and been so very uneasy. As he entered the room all that conversation with Augustus Staveley returned upon his memory. He had seen his friend in London, and told him that he was going down to Noningsby. Augustus had looked grave, but had said nothing about Madeline. Augustus was not in his father's confidence in this matter, and had nothing to do but to look grave. On that very morning, moreover, some cause had been given to himself for gravity of demeanour.

At the door of his room he met Mrs. Baker, and, hurried though he was by the judge's strict injunction, he could not but shake hands with his old and very worthy friend.

"Quite strong again," said he in answer to her tender inquiries.

"So you are, I do declare. I will say this, Mr. Graham, for wholesomeness of flesh you beat anything I ever come nigh. There's a many would have been weeks and weeks before they could have been moved."

"It was your good nursing, Mrs. Baker."

"Well, I think we did take care of you among us. Do you remember the pheasant, Mr. Graham?"

"Remember it! I should think so; and how I improved the occasion."

"Yes; you did improve fast enough. And the sea-kale, Mr. Graham. Laws! the row I had with John Gardener about that! And, Mr. Graham, do you remember how a certain friend used to come and ask after you at the door? Dear, dear, dear! I nearly caught it about that."

But Graham in his present frame of mind could not well endure to discuss his remembrances on that subject

with Mrs. Baker, so he good-humouredly pushed her out of the room, saying that the judge would be mad if he delayed.

"That's true, too, Mr. Graham. And it won't do for you to take up Mr. Augustus's tricks in the house yet; will it?" And then she left the room. "What does she mean by 'yet'?" Felix said to himself as he went through the ceremony of dressing with all the haste in his power.

He was in the drawing-room almost within the fifteen minutes, and there he found none but the judge and his wife and daughter. He had at first expected to find Augustus there, but had been told by Mrs. Baker that he was to come down on the following morning. His first greeting from Lady Staveley was something like that he had already received up stairs, only made in less exuberant language. He was congratulated on his speedy recovery and made welcome by a kind smile. Then he shook hands with Madeline, and as he did so he observed that the judge was at the trouble to turn away, so that he should not watch the greeting. This he did see, but into Madeline's face he hardly ventured to look. He touched her hand, however, and said a word; and she also murmured something about his injury. "And now we'll go to dinner," said the judge. "Give your arm that is not broken to Lady Staveley." And so the meeting was over. "Augustus will be in Alston to-morrow when the court is opened," said the judge. "That is to say if he finds it possible to get up so soon; but to-day he had some engagements in town." The truth however was that the judge had chosen to be alone with Felix after dinner.

The dinner was very pleasant, but the judge talked for the whole party. Madeline hardly spoke at all, nor

did Lady Staveley say much. Felix managed to put in a few words occasionally, as it always becomes a good listener to do, but the brunt of the battle lay with the host. One thing Felix observed painfully, that not a word was spoken about Lady Mason or Orley Farm. When he had been last there the judge had spoken of it openly before the whole party, expressing his opinion that she was a woman much injured; but now neither did he say anything nor did Lady Staveley. He would probably not have observed this had not a feeling crept upon him during the last fortnight, that that thorough conviction which men had felt as to her innocence was giving way. While the ladies were there, however, he did not himself allude to the subject.

When they had left the room and the door had been closed behind them, the judge began the campaign—began it, and as far as he was concerned ended it in a very few minutes. “Graham,” said he, “I am glad to see you.”

“Thank you, judge,” said he.

“Of course you know, and I know, what that amounts to now. My idea is that you acted as an honest man when you were last here. You are not a rich man——”

“Anything but that.”

“And therefore I do not think it would have been well had you endeavoured to gain my daughter’s affections without speaking to me,—or to her mother.” Judge Staveley always spoke of his wife as though she were an absolute part of himself. “She and I have discussed the matter now, and you are at liberty to address yourself to Madeline if you please.”

“My dear judge——”

“Of course you understand that I am not answering for her?”

"Oh, of course not."

"That's your look out. You must fight your own battle there. What you are allowed to understand is this,—that her father and mother will give their consent to an engagement, if she finds that she can bring herself to give hers. If you are minded to ask her you may do so."

"Of course I shall ask her."

"She will have five thousand pounds on her marriage, settled upon herself and her children, and as much more when I die, settled in the same way. Now fill your glass." And in his own easy way he turned the subject round and began to talk about the late congress at Birmingham.

Felix felt that it was not open to him at the present moment to say anything further about Madeline; and though he was disappointed at this,—for he would have wished to go on talking about her all the evening,—perhaps it was better for him. The judge would have said nothing further to encourage him, and he would have gradually been taught to think that his chance with Madeline was little, and then less. "He must have been a fool," my readers will say, "not to have known that Madeline was now his own." Probably. But then, modest-minded young men are fools.

At last he contrived to bring the conversation round from the Birmingham congress to the affairs of his new client; and indeed he contrived to do so in spite of the judge, who was not particularly anxious to speak on the subject. "After all that we said and did at Birmingham, it is odd that I should so soon find myself joined with Mr. Furnival."

"Not at all odd. Of course you must take up your profession as others have taken it up before you. Very

many young men dream of a Themis fit for Utopia. You have slept somewhat longer than others, and your dreams have been more vivid."

"And now I wake to find myself leagued with the Thompson and Duxley of our latter-day law courts."

"Fie, Graham, fie. Do not allow yourself to speak in that tone of men whom you know to be zealous advocates and whom you do not know to be dishonest opponents."

"It is they and such as they that make so many in these days feel the need of some Utopia,—as it was in the old days of our history. But I beg their pardon for nicknaming them, and certainly ought not to have done so in your presence."

"Well; if you repent yourself, and will be more charitable for the future, I will not tell of you."

"I have never yet even seen Mr. Chaffanbrass in court," said Felix, after a pause.

"The more shame for you never to have gone to the court in which he practices. A barrister intending to succeed at the common law bar cannot have too wide an experience in such matters."

"But then I fear that I am a barrister not intending to succeed."

"I am very sorry to hear it," said the judge. And then again the conversation flagged for a minute or two.

"Have you ever seen him at a country assize town before, judge?" asked Felix.

"Whom? Chaffanbrass? I do not remember that I have."

"His coming down in this way is quite unusual I take it."

"Rather so, I should say. The Old Bailey is his own ground."

"And why should they think it necessary in such a case as this to have recourse to such a proceeding?"

"It would be for me to ask you that, seeing that you are one of the counsel."

"Do you mean to say, judge, that between you and me you are unwilling to give an opinion on such a subject?"

"Well; you press me hard, and I think I may fairly say that I am unwilling. I would sooner discuss the matter with you after the verdict than before it. Come; we will go into the drawing-room."

There was not much in this. Indeed if it were properly looked at there was nothing in it. But nevertheless, Graham, as he preceded the judge out of the dining-room, felt that his heart misgave him about Lady Mason. When first the matter had been spoken of at Noningsby, Judge Staveley had been fully convinced of Lady Mason's innocence, and had felt no reserve in expressing his opinion. He had expressed such an opinion very openly. Why should he now affect so much reticence, seeing that the question had been raised in the presence of them two alone? It was he who had persuaded Graham to undertake this work, and now he went back from what he had done, and refused even to speak upon the subject. "It must be that he thinks she is guilty," said Graham to himself, as he lay down that night in bed.

But there had been something more for him to do before bedtime came. He followed the judge into the drawing-room, and in five minutes perceived that his host had taken up a book with the honest intention of reading it. Some reference was made to him by his wife, but he showed at once that he did not regard Graham as company, and that he conceived himself to

be entitled to enjoy the full luxury of home. "Upon my word I don't know," he answered, without taking his eye off the page. And then nobody spoke to him another word.

After another short interval Lady Staveley went to sleep. When Felix Graham had before been at Noningsby, she would have rebelled against nature with all her force rather than have slept while he was left to whisper what he would to her darling. But now he was authorised to whisper, and why should not Lady Staveley sleep if she wished it? She did sleep, and Felix was left alone with his love.

And yet he was not altogether alone. He could not say to her those words which he was now bound to say; which he longed to say in order that he might know whether the next stage of his life was to be light or dark. There sat the judge, closely intent no doubt upon his book, but wide awake. There also sat Lady Staveley, fast asleep certainly; but with a wondrous power of hearing even in her sleep. And yet how was he to talk to his love unless he talked of love? He wished that the judge would help them to converse; he wished that some one else was there; he wished at last that he himself was away. Madeline sat perfectly tranquil stitching a collar. Upon her there was incumbent no duty of doing anything beyond that. But he was in a measure bound to talk. Had he dared to do so he also would have taken up a book; but that he knew to be impossible.

"Your brother will be down to-morrow," he said at last.

"Yes; he is to go direct to Alston. He will be here in the evening,—to dinner."

"Ah, yes; I suppose we shall all be late to-morrow."

"Papa always is late when the assizes are going on," said Madeline.

"Alston is not very far," said Felix.

"Only two miles," she answered.

And during the whole of that long evening the conversation between them did not reach a more interesting pitch than that.

"She must think me an utter fool," said Felix to himself, as he sat staring at the fire. "How well her brother would have made the most of such an opportunity!" And then he went to bed by no means in a good humour with himself.

On the next morning he again met her at breakfast, but on that occasion there was no possible opportunity for private conversation. The judge was all alive, and talked enough for the whole party during the twenty minutes that was allowed to them before they started for Alston. "And now we must be off. We'll say half-past seven for dinner, my dear." And then they also made their journey to Alston.

CHAPTER XII

SHOWING HOW MISS FURNIVAL TREATED HER LOVERS

It is a great thing for young ladies to live in a household in which free correspondence by letter is permitted. "Two for mamma, four for Amelia, three for Fanny, and one for papa. When the postman has left his budget they should be dealt out in that way, and no more should be said about it,—except what each may choose to say. Papa's letter is about money of course, and interests nobody. Mamma's contain the character of a cook and an invitation to dinner, and as they interest everybody, are public property. But Fanny's letters and Amelia's should be private; and a well-bred mamma of the present day scorns even to look at the handwriting of the addresses. Now in Harley Street things were so managed that nobody did see the handwriting of the addresses of Sophia's letters till they came into her own hand,—that is, neither her father nor her mother did so. That both Spooner and Mrs. Ball examined them closely is probable enough.

This was well for her now, for she did not wish it to be known as yet that she had accepted an offer from Lucius Mason, and she did wish to have the privilege of receiving his letters. She fancied that she loved him. She told herself over and over again that she did so. She compared him within her own mind to Augustus Staveley, and always gave the preference to Lucius. She liked Augustus also, and could have accepted him as well, had it been the way of the world in England

for ladies to have two accepted lovers. Such is not the way of the world in England, and she therefore had been under the necessity of choosing one. She had taken the better of the two, she declared to herself very often; but nevertheless was it absolutely necessary that the other should be abandoned altogether? Would it not be well at any rate to wait till this trial should be over? But then the young men themselves were in such a hurry!

Lucius, like an honest man, had proposed to go at once to Mr. Furnival when he was accepted; but to this Sophia had objected. "The peculiar position in which my father stands to your mother at the present moment," said she, "would make it very difficult for him to give you an answer now." Lucius did not quite understand the reasoning, but he yielded. It did not occur to him for a moment that either Mr. or Miss Furnival could doubt the validity of his title to the Orley Farm property.

But there was no reason why he should not write to her. "Shall I address here?" he had asked. "Oh yes," said Sophia; "my letters are quite private." And he had written very frequently, and she had answered him. His last letter before the trial I propose to publish, together with Sophia's answer, giving it as my opinion that the gentleman's production affords by no means a good type of a lover's letter. But then his circumstances were peculiar. Miss Furnival's answer was, I think, much better.

"Orley Farm, — — —

"**MY OWN SOPHIA,**

"My only comfort—I may really say my only comfort now—is in writing to you. It is odd that at my age, and having begun the world early as I did, I

should now find myself so much alone. Were it not for you, I should have no friend. I cannot describe to you the sadness of this house, nor the wretched state in which my mother exists. I sometimes think that had she been really guilty of those monstrous crimes which people lay to her charge, she could hardly have been more miserable. I do not understand it; nor can I understand why your father has surrounded her with lawyers whom he would not himself trust in a case of any moment. To me she never speaks on the subject which makes the matter worse—worse for both of us. I see her at breakfast and at dinner, and sometimes sit with her for an hour in the evening; but even then we have no conversation. The end of it is I trust soon coming, and then I hope that the sun will again be bright. In these days it seems as though there were a cloud over the whole earth.

"I wish with all my heart that you could have been here with her. I think that your tone and strength of mind would have enabled her to bear up against these troubles with more fortitude. After all it is but a shadow of misfortune which has come across her, if she would but allow herself so to think. As it is, Mrs. Orme is with her daily, and nothing I am sure can be more kind. But I can confess to you, though I could do so to no one else, that I do not willingly see an intimacy kept up between my mother and The Cleeve. Why was there that strange proposition as to her marriage; and why, when it was once made, was it abandoned; I know that my mother has been not only guiltless, but guileless, in these matters as to which she is accused; but nevertheless her affairs will have been so managed that it will be almost impossible for her to remain in this neighbourhood.

"When this is all over, I think I shall sell this place. What is there to bind me,—to bind me or you to Orley Farm? Sometimes I have thought that I could be happy here, devoting myself to agriculture,"—"Fiddlesticks!" Sophia exclaimed, as she read this,—“and doing something to lessen the dense ignorance of those around me; but for such work as that a man should be able to extend himself over a larger surface than that which I can influence. My dream of happiness now carries me away from this to other countries,—to the sunny south. Could you be happy there? A friend of mine whom I well knew in Germany, has a villa on the Lake of Como,"—"Indeed, Sir, I'll do no such thing," said Sophia to herself,—“and there I think we might forget all this annoyance.

"I shall not write again now till the trial is over. I have made up my mind that I will be in court during the whole proceedings. If my mother will admit it, I will remain there close to her, as her son should do in such an emergency. If she will not have this, still I will be there. No one shall say that I am afraid to see my mother in any position to which fortune can bring her, or that I have ever doubted her innocence.

"God bless you, my own one.

"Yours,

"L. M."

Taking this letter as a whole perhaps we may say that there was not as much nonsense in it as young gentlemen generally put into their love-letters to young ladies; but I am inclined to think that it would have been a better love-letter had there been more nonsense. At any rate there should have been less about himself, and more about the lady. He should have omitted the agriculture altogether, and been more sure of his loved

one's tastes before he suggested the sunny south and the Como villa. It is true that he was circumstanced as few lovers are, with reference to his mother; but still I think he might have been less lachrymose. Sophia's answer, which was sent after the lapse of a day or two, was as follows:—

“ Harley Street, ——————

“ MY DEAR LUCIUS,

“ I am not surprised that you should feel somewhat low-spirited at the present moment; but you will find, I have no doubt, that the results of the next week will cure all that. Your mother will be herself again when this trial is over, and you will then wonder that it should ever have had so depressing an influence either upon you or upon her. I cannot but suppose that papa has done the best as to her advisers. I know how anxious he is about it, and they say that he is very clever in such matters. Pray give your mother my love. I cannot but think she is lucky to have Mrs. Orme with her. What can be more respectable than a connection at such a time with such people?

“ As to your future residence, do not make up your mind to anything while your spirits are thus depressed. If you like to leave Orley Farm, why not let it instead of selling it? As for me, if it should be fated that our lots are to go together, I am inclined to think that I should still prefer to live in England. In London papa's position might probably be of some service, and I should like no life that was not active. But it is too early in the day to talk thus at present. You must not think me cold hearted if I say that what has as yet been between us must not be regarded as an absolute and positive engagement. I, on my part, hope that it may become so.

My heart is not cold, and I am not ashamed to own that I esteem you favourably; but marriage is a very serious thing, and there is so much to be considered! I regard myself as a free agent, and in a great measure independent of my parents on such a matter as that; but still I think it well to make no positive promise without consulting them. When this trial is over I will speak to my father, and then you will come up to London and see us.

"Mind you give my love to your mother; and—if it have any value in your eyes—accept it yourself.

"Your affectionate friend,
"SOPHIA FURNIVAL."

I feel very confident that Mrs. Furnival was right in declining to inquire very closely into the circumstances of her daughter's correspondence. A young lady who could write such a letter to her lover as that requires but little looking after; and in those points as to which she may require it, will—if she be so minded—elude it. Such as Miss Furnival was, no care on her mother's part would, I think, have made her better. Much care might have made her worse, as, had she been driven to such resources, she would have received her letters under a false name at the baker's shop round the corner.

But the last letter was not written throughout without interruption. She was just declaring how on her part she hoped that her present uncertain tenure of her lover's hand might at some future time become certain, when Augustus Staveley was announced. Sophia, who was alone in the drawing-room, rose from her table, gracefully, slipped her note under the cover of the desk, and courteously greeted her visitor. "And how are they all at dear Noningsby?" she asked.

"Dear Noningsby is nearly deserted. There is no one there but my mother and Madeline."

"And who more would be wanting to make it still dear,—unless it be the judge? I declare, Mr. Staveley, I was quite in love with your father when I left. Talk of honey falling from people's mouths!—he drops nothing less than champagne and pineapples."

"How very difficult of digestion his conversation must be!"

"By no means. If the wine be good and the fruit ripe, nothing can be more wholesome. And is everybody else gone? Let me see;—Mr. Graham was still there when I left."

"He came away shortly afterwards,—as soon, that is, as his arm would allow him."

"What a happy accident that was for him, Mr. Staveley!"

"Happy!—breaking three of his ribs, his arm, and his collarbone! I thought it very unhappy."

"Ah, that's because your character is so deficient in true chivalry. I call it a very happy accident which gives a gentleman an opportunity of spending six weeks under the same roof with the lady of his love. Mr. Graham is a man of spirit, and I am by no means sure that he did not break his bones on purpose."

Augustus for a moment thought of denying the imputation with regard to his sister, but before he had spoken he had changed his mind. He was already aware that his friend had been again invited down to Noningsby, and if his father chose to encourage Graham, why should he make difficulties? He had conceived some general idea that Felix Graham was not a guest to be welcomed into a rich man's family as a son-in-law. He was poor and crotchety, and as regards

professional matters unsteady. But all that was a matter for his father to consider, not for him. So he held his peace as touching Graham, and contrived to change the subject, veering round towards that point of the compass which had brought him into Harley Street.

"Perhaps then, Miss Furnival, it might answer some purpose if I were to get myself run over outside there. I could get one of Pickford's vans, or a dray from Barclay and Perkins', if that might be thought serviceable."

"It would be of no use in the world, Mr. Staveley. Those very charitable middle-aged ladies opposite, the Miss MacCodies, would have you into their house in no time, and when you woke from your first swoon, you would find yourself in their best bedroom, with one on each side of you."

"And you in the mean time——"

"I should send over every morning at ten o'clock to inquire after you—in mamma's name. 'Mrs. Furnival's compliments, and hopes Mr. Staveley will recover the use of his legs.' And the man would bring back word: 'The doctor hopes he may, Miss; but his left eye is gone for ever.' It is not everybody that can tumble discreetly. Now you, I fancy, would only disfigure yourself."

"Then I must try what fortune can do for me without the brewer's dray."

"Fortune has done quite enough for you, Mr. Staveley; I do not advise you to tempt her any further."

"Miss Furnival, I have come to Harley Street to-day on purpose to tempt her to the uttermost. There is my hand——"

"Mr. Staveley, pray keep your hand for a while longer in your own possession."

"Undoubtedly I shall do so, unless I dispose of it this morning. When we were at Noningsby together, I ventured to tell you what I felt for you——"

"Did you, Mr. Staveley? If your feelings were anything beyond the common, I don't remember the telling."

"And then," he continued, without choosing to notice her words, "you affected to believe that I was not in earnest in what I said to you."

"And you must excuse me if I affect to believe the same thing of you still."

Augustus Staveley had come into Harley Street with a positive resolve to throw his heart and hand and fortune at the feet of Miss Furnival. I fear that I shall not raise him in the estimation of my readers by saying so. But then my readers will judge him unfairly. They will forget that they have had a much better opportunity of looking into the character of Miss Furnival than he had had; and they will also forget that they have had no such opportunity of being influenced by her personal charms. I think I remarked before that Miss Furnival well understood how best to fight her own battle. Had she shown herself from the first anxious to regard as a definite offer the first words tending that way which Augustus had spoken to her, he would at once have become indifferent about the matter. As a consequence of her judicious conduct he was not indifferent. We always want that which we can't get easily. Sophia had made herself difficult to be gotten, and therefore Augustus fancied that he wanted her. Since he had been in town he had been frequently in Harley Street, and had been arguing with himself on the

matter. What match could be more discreet or better? Not only was she very handsome, but she was clever also. And not only was she handsome and clever, but moreover she was an heiress. What more could his friends want for him, and what more could he want for himself? His mother did in truth regard her as a nasty, sly girl; but then his mother did not know Sophia, and in such matters mothers are so ignorant!

Miss Furnival, on his thus repeating his offer, again chose to affect a belief that he was not in earnest. I am inclined to think that she rather liked this kind of thing. There is an excitement in the game; and it is one which may be played without great danger to either party if it be played cautiously and with some skill. As regards Augustus at the present moment, I have to say—with some regret—that he abandoned all idea of caution, and that he showed very little skill.

"Then," said he, "I must beg you to lay aside an affectation which is so very injurious both to my honour and to my hopes of happiness."

"Your honour, Mr. Staveley, is quite safe, I am certain."

"I wish that my happiness were equally so," said he. "But at any rate you will let me have an answer. Sophia——"

And now he stood up, looking at her with something really like love in his eyes, and Miss Furnival began to understand that if she so chose it the prize was really within her reach. But then was it a prize? The other thing was the better prize;—if only that affair about the Orley Farm was settled. Augustus Staveley was a good-looking handsome fellow, but then there was that in the manner and gait of Lucius Mason which better suited her taste. There are ladies who prefer

Worcester ware to real china; and, moreover, the order for the Worcester ware had already been given.

"Sophia, let a man be ever so light-hearted, there will come to him moments of absolute and almost terrible earnestness."

"Even to you, Mr. Staveley."

"I have done nothing to deserve your scorn."

"Fie, now; you to talk of my scorn! You come here with soft words which run easily from your tongue, feeling sure that I shall be proud in heart when I hear them whispered into my ears; and now you pretend to be angry because I do not show you that I am elated. Do you think it probable that I should treat with scorn anything of this sort that you might say to me seriously?"

"I think you are doing so."

"Have you generally found yourself treated with scorn when you have been out on this pursuit?"

"By Heavens! you have no right to speak to me so. In what way shall I put my words to make them sound seriously to you? Do you want me to kneel at your feet, as our grandfathers used to do?"

"Oh, certainly not. Our grandmothers were very stupid in desiring that."

"If I put my hand on my heart will you believe me better?"

"Not in the least."

"Then through what formula shall I go?"

"Go through no formula, Mr. Staveley. In such affairs as these very little, as I take it, depends on the words that are uttered. When heart has spoken to heart, or even head to head, very little other speaking is absolutely necessary."

"And my heart has not spoken to yours?"

"Well;—no;—not with that downright plain open

language which a heart in earnest always knows how to use. I suppose you think you like me?"

"Sophia, I love you well enough to make you my wife to-morrow."

"Yes; and to be tired of your bargain on the next day. Has it ever occurred to you that giving and taking in marriage is a very serious thing?"

"A very serious thing; but I do not think that on that account it should be avoided."

"No; but it seems to me that you are always inclined to play at marriage. Do not be angry with me, but for the life of me I can never think you are in earnest."

"But I shall be angry—very angry—if I do not get from you some answer to what I have ventured to say."

"What, now; to day;—this morning? If you insist upon that, the answer can only be of one sort. If I am driven to decide this morning on the question that you have asked me, great as the honour is—and coming from you, Mr. Staveley, it is very great—I must decline it. I am not able, at any rate at the present moment, to trust my happiness altogether in your hands." When we think of the half-written letter which at this moment Miss Furnival had within her desk, this was not wonderful.

And then, without having said anything more that was of note, Augustus Staveley went his way. As he walked up Harley Street, he hardly knew whether or no he was to consider himself as bound to Miss Furnival; nor did he feel quite sure whether or no he wished to be so bound. She was handsome, and clever, and an heiress; but yet he was not certain that she possessed all those womanly charms which are desirable in a wife. He could not but reflect that she had never yet said a soft word to him.

CHAPTER XIII

MR. MOULDER BACKS HIS OPINION

As the day of the trial drew nigh, the perturbation of poor John Kenneby's mind became very great. Moulder had not intended to frighten him, but had thought it well to put him up to what he believed to be the truth. No doubt he would be badgered and bullied. "And," as Moulder said to his wife afterwards, "wasn't it better that he should know what was in store for him?" The consequence was, that had it been by any means possible, Kenneby would have run away on the day before the trial.

But it was by no means possible, for Dockwrath had hardly left him alone for an instant. Dockwrath at this time had crept into a sort of employment in the case from which Matthew Round had striven in vain to exclude him. Mr. Round had declared once or twice that if Mr. Mason encouraged Dockwrath to interfere, he, Round, would throw the matter up. But professional men cannot very well throw up their business, and Round went on, although Dockwrath did interfere, and although Mr. Mason did encourage him. On the eve of the trial he went down to Alston with Kenneby and Bolster; and Mr. Moulder, at the express instance of Kenneby, accompanied them.

"What can I do? I can't stop the fellow's gab," Moulder had said. But Kenneby pleaded hard that some friend might be near him in the day of his trouble, and Moulder at last consented.

"I wish it was me," Mrs. Smith said. "They talked the matter over in Grange, and I let the barrister know what was wanted, but he would not knock me about." Kenneby wished to have his heart.

Mr. Mason went down by the train, which travelled by the first class. Dockwrath, who was holding his head up, would have gone with him, had he not thought it better to remain with Kenneby. "He might jump out of the carriage and destroy himself," he said to Mr. Mason.

"If he had any of the feelings of an Englishman within his breast," said Mason, "he would be anxious to give assistance towards the punishment of such a criminal as that."

"He has only the feelings of a tomtit," said Dockwrath.

Lodgings had been taken for the two chief witnesses together, and Moulder and Dockwrath shared the accommodation with them. As they sat down to tea together, these two gentlemen doubtless felt that Bridget Bolster was not exactly fitting company for them. But the necessities of an assize week, and of such a trial as this, levelled much of these distinctions, and they were both prepared to condescend and become affable.

"Well, Mrs. Bolster, and how do you find yourself?" asked Dockwrath.

Bridget was a solid, square-looking woman, somewhat given to flesh, and now not very quick in her movements. But the nature of her past life had given to her a certain amount of readiness, and an absence of that dread of her fellow-creatures which so terribly afflicted poor Kenneby. And then also she was naturally not a stupid woman, or one inclined to be muddle-

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d. Perhaps it would be too much to say that she was generally intelligent, but what she did understand, she understood thoroughly.

"Pretty well, I thank you, Mr. Dockwrath. I sha'n't be sorry to have a bit of something to my tea."

Bridget Bolster perfectly understood that she was to be well fed when thus brought out for work in her country's service. To have everything that she wanted to eat and drink at places of public entertainment, and then to have the bills paid for her behind her back was to Bridget Bolster the summit of transitory human bliss.

"And you shall have something to your tea," said Dockwrath. "What's it to be?"

"A steak's as good as anything at these places," suggested Moulder.

"Or some ham and eggs," suggested Dockwrath.

"Kidneys is nice," said Bridget.

"What do you say, Kenneby?" asked Dockwrath.

"It is nothing to me," said Kenneby; "I have no appetite. I think I'll take a little brandy and water."

Mr. Moulder possessed the most commanding spirit, and the steak was ordered. They then made themselves as comfortable as circumstances would admit, and gradually fell into a general conversation about the trial. It had been understood among them since they first came together, that as a matter of etiquette the witnesses were not to be asked what they had to say. Kenneby was not to divulge his facts in plain language, nor Bridget Bolster those which belonged to her; but it was open to them all to take a general view of the matter, and natural that at the present moment they should hardly be able to speak of anything else. And there was a very divided opinion on the subject in

dispute : Dockwrath, of course, expressing a strong conviction in favour of a verdict of guilty, and Moulder being as certain of an acquittal. At first Moulder had been very unwilling to associate with Dockwrath; for he was a man who maintained his animosities long within his breast; but Dockwrath on this occasion was a great man, and there was some slight reflection of greatness on the associates of Dockwrath; it was only by the assistance of Dockwrath that a place could be obtained within the court, and, upon the whole, it became evident to Moulder that during such a crisis as this the society of Dockwrath must be endured.

"They can't do anything to one if one do one's best?" said Kenneby, who was sitting apart from the table while the others were eating.

"Of course they can't," said Dockwrath, who wished to inspirit the witnesses on his own side.

"It aint what they do, but what they say," said Moulder; "and then everybody is looking at you. I remember a case when I was young on the road; it was at Nottingham. There had been some sugars delivered, and the rats had got at it. I'm blessed if they didn't ask me backwards and forwards so often that I forgot whether they was seconds or thirds, though I sold the goods myself. And then the lawyer said he'd have me prosecuted for perjury. Well, I was that frightened, I could not stand in the box. I aint so green now by a good deal."

"I'm sure you're not, Mr. Moulder," said Bridget, who well understood the class to which Moulder belonged.

"After that I met that lawyer in the street, and was ashamed to look him in the face. I'm blessed if he didn't come up and shake hands with me, and tell me

that he knew all along that his client hadn't a leg to stand on. Now I call that beautiful."

"Beautiful!" said Kenneby.

"Yes, I do. He fought that battle just as if he was sure of winning, though he knew he was going to lose. Give me the man that can fight a losing battle. Anybody can play whist with four by honours in his own hand."

"I don't object to four by honours either," said Dockwrath; "and that's the game we are going to play to-morrow."

"And lose the rubber after all," said Moulder.

"No, I'm blessed if we do, Mr. Moulder. If I know anything of my own profession——"

"Humph!" ejaculated Moulder.

"And I shouldn't be here in such a case as this if I didn't;—but if I do, Lady Mason has no more chance of escape than—than—than that bit of muffin has." And as he spoke the savoury morsel in question disappeared from the fingers of the commercial traveller.

For a moment or two Moulder could not answer him. The portion of food in question was the last on his plate; it had been considerable in size, and required attention in mastication. Then the remaining gravy had to be picked up on the blade of the knife, and the particles of pickles collected and disposed of by the same process. But when all this had been well done, Moulder replied—

"That may be your opinion, Mr. Dockwrath, and I dare say you may know what you're about."

"Well; I rather think I do, Mr. Moulder."

"Mine's different. Now when one gentleman thinks one thing and another thinks another, there's nothing

for it in my mind but for each gentleman to back his own. That's about the ticket in this country, I believe."

"That's just as a gentleman may feel disposed," said Dockwrath.

"No it aint. What's the use of a man having an opinion if he won't back it? He's bound to back it, or else he should give way, and confess he aint so sure about it as he said he was. There's no coming to an end if you don't do that. Now there's a ten-pound note," and Moulder produced that amount of the root of all evil; "I'll put that in John Kenneby's hands, and do you cover it." And then he looked as though there were no possible escape from the proposition which he had made.

"I decline to have anything to do with it," said Kenneby.

"Gammon," said Moulder; "two ten-pound notes won't burn a hole in your pocket."

"Suppose I should be asked a question about it to-morrow; where should I be then?"

"Don't trouble yourself, Mr. Kenneby," said Dockwrath; "I'm not going to bet."

"You aint, aint you?" said Moulder.

"Certainly not, Mr. Moulder. If you understood professional matters a little better, you'd know that a professional gentleman couldn't make a bet as to a case partly in his own hands without very great impropriety." And Dockwrath gathered himself up, endeavouring to impress a sense of his importance on the two witnesses, even should he fail of doing so upon Mr. Moulder.

Moulder repocketed his ten-pound note, and laughed with a long, low chuckle. According to his idea of things, he had altogether got the better of the attorney

upon that subject. As he himself put it so plainly, what criterion is there by which a man can test the validity of his own opinion if he be not willing to support it by a bet? A man is bound to do so, or else to give way and apologise. For many years he had insisted upon this in commercial rooms as a fundamental law in the character and conduct of gentlemen, and never yet had anything been said to him to show that in such a theory he was mistaken.

During all this Bridget Bolster sat there much delighted. It was not necessary to her pleasure that she should say much herself. There she was seated in the society of gentlemen and of men of the world, with a cup of tea beside her, and the expectation of a little drop of something warm afterwards. What more could the world offer to her, or what more had the world to offer to anybody? As far as her feelings went she did not care if Lady Mason were tried every month in the year! Not that her feelings towards Lady Mason were cruel. It was nothing to her whether Lady Mason should be convicted or acquitted. But it was much to her to sit quietly on her chair and have nothing to do, to eat and drink of the best, and be made much of; and it was very much to her to hear the conversation of her betters.

On the following morning Dockwrath breakfasted by appointment with Mr. Mason,—promising, however, that he would return to his friends whom he left behind him, and introduce them into the court in proper time. As I have before hinted, Mr. Mason's confidence in Dockwrath had gone on increasing day by day since they had first met each other at Groby Park, till he now wished that he had altogether taken the advice of the Hamworth attorney and put this matter entirely into

his hands. By degrees Joseph Mason had learned to understand and thoroughly to appreciate the strong points in his own case; and now he was so fully convinced of the truth of those surmises which Dockwrath had been the first to make, that no amount of contrary evidence could have shaken him. And why had not Round and Crook found this out when the matter was before investigated? Why had they prevented him from appealing to the Lord Chancellor when, through their own carelessness, the matter had gone against him in the inferior court? And why did they now, even in these latter days, when they were driven to reopen the case by the clearness of the evidence submitted to them, —why did they even now wound his ears, irritate his temper, and oppose the warmest feelings of his heart by expressing pity for this wicked criminal, whom it was their bounden duty to prosecute to the very utmost? Was it not by their fault that Orley Farm had been lost to him for the last twenty years? And yet young Round had told him, with the utmost composure, that it would be useless for him to look for any of those moneys which should have accrued to him during all those years! After what had passed, young Round should have been anxious to grind Lucius Mason into powder, and make money of his very bones! Must he not think, when he considered all these things, that Round and Crook had been wilfully dishonest to him, and that their interest had been on the side of Lady Mason? He did so think at last, under the beneficent tutelage of his new adviser, and had it been possible would have taken the case out of the hands of Round and Crook even during the week before the trial.

"We mustn't do it now," Dockwrath had said, in his triumph. "If we did, the whole thing would be delayed.

But they shall be so watched that they shall not be able to throw the thing over. I've got them in a vice, Mr. Mason; and I'll hold them so tight that they must convict her whether they will or no."

And the nature and extent of Mr. Dockwrath's reward had been already settled. When Lucius Mason should be expelled from Orley Farm with ignominy, he, Dockwrath, should become the tenant. The very rent was settled with the understanding that it should be remitted for the first year. It would be pleasant to him to have back his two fields in this way;—his two fields, and something else beyond! It may be remembered that Lucius Mason had once gone to his office insulting him. It would now be his turn to visit Lucius Mason at his domicile. He was disposed to think that such visit would be made by him with more effect than had attended that other.

"Well, Sir, we're all right," he said as he shook hands with Mr. Mason of Groby; "there's no screw loose that I can find."

"And will that man be able to speak?" Mr. Mason was alluding to John Kenneby.

"I think he will, as corroborating the woman Bolster. That's all we shall want. We shall put up the woman first; that is, after I have done. I don't think they'll make much of her, Mr. Mason."

"They can't make her say that she signed two deeds if she is willing to tell the truth. There's no danger, you think, that she's been tampered with,—that she has taken money."

"No, no; there's been nothing of that."

"They'd do anything, you know," said Mr. Mason. "Think of such a man as Solomon Aram! He's been used to it all his life, you know."

"They could not do it, Mr. Mason; I've been too sharp on them. And I tell you what—they know it now. There isn't one of them that doesn't know we shall get a verdict." And then for a few minutes there was silence between the two friends.

"I'll tell you what, Dockwrath," said Mr. Mason, after a while; "I've so set my heart upon this—upon getting justice at last—that I do think it would kill me if I were to be beaten. I do, indeed. I've known this, you know, all my life; and think what I've felt! For twenty-two years, Dockwrath! By —! in all that I have read I don't think I ever heard of such a hardship! That she should have robbed me for two-and-twenty years!—And now they say that she will be imprisoned for twelve months!"

"She'll get more than that, Mr. Mason."

"I know what would have been done to her thirty years ago, when the country was in earnest about such matters. What did they do to Fauntleroy?"

"Things are changed since then, aint they?" said Dockwrath, with a laugh. And then he went to look up his flock, and take them into court. "I'll meet you in the hall, Mr. Mason, in twenty minutes from this time."

And so the play was beginning on each side.

CHAPTER XIV

THE FIRST DAY OF THE TRIAL

AND now the judge was there on the bench, the barristers and the attorneys were collected, the prisoner was seated in their presence, and the trial was begun. As is usual in cases of much public moment, when a person of mark is put upon his purgation, or the offence is one which has attracted notice, a considerable amount of time was spent in preliminaries. But we, who are not bound by the necessities under which the court laboured, will pass over these somewhat rapidly. The prisoner was arraigned on the charge of perjury, and pleaded "not guilty" in a voice which, though low, was audible to all the court. At that moment the hum of voices had stayed itself, and the two small words, spoken in a clear, silver tone, reached the ears of all that then were there assembled. Some had surmised it to be possible that she would at the last moment plead guilty, but such persons had not known Lady Mason. And then by slow degrees a jury was sworn, a considerable number of jurors having been set aside at the instance of Lady Mason's counsel. Mr. Aram had learned to what part of the county each man belonged, and upon his instructions those who came from the neighbourhood of Hamworth were passed over.

The comparative lightness of the offence divested the commencement of the trial of much of that importance and apparent dignity which attach themselves to most

celebrated criminal cases. The prisoner was not bidden to look upon the juror, nor the juror to look upon the prisoner, as though a battle for life and death were to be fought between them. A true bill for perjury had come down to the court from the grand jury, but the court officials could not bring themselves on such an occasion to open the case with all that solemnity and deference to the prisoner which they would have exhibited had she been charged with murdering her old husband. Nor was it even the same as though she had been accused of forgery. Though forgery be not now a capital crime, it was so within our memories, and there is still a certain grandeur in the name. But perjury sounds small and petty, and it was not therefore till the trial had advanced a stage or two that it assumed that importance which it afterwards never lost. That this should be so cut Mr. Mason of Groby to the very soul. Even Mr. Dockwrath had been unable to make him understand that his chance of regaining the property was under the present circumstances much greater than it would have been had Lady Mason been arraigned for forgery. He would not believe that the act of forgery might possibly not have been proved. Could she have been first whipped through the street for the misdemeanour, and then hung for the felony, his spirit would not have been more than sufficiently appeased.

The case was opened by one Mr. Steelyard, the junior counsel for the prosecution; but his work on this occasion was hardly more than formal. He merely stated the nature of the accusation against Lady Mason, and the issue which the jury were called upon to try. Then got up Sir Richard Leatherham, the solicitor-general, and at great length and with wonderful perspicuity explained all the circumstances of the case,

beginning with the undoubted will left by Sir Joseph Mason, the will independently of the codicil, and coming down gradually to the discovery of that document in Mr. Dockwrath's office, which led to the surmise that the signature of those two witnesses had been obtained, not to a codicil to a will, but to a deed of another character. In doing this Sir Richard did not seem to lean very heavily upon Lady Mason, nor did he say much as to the wrongs suffered by Mr. Mason of Groby. When he alluded to Mr. Dockwrath and his part in these transactions, he paid no compliment to the Hamworth attorney; but in referring to his learned friend on the other side he protested his conviction that the defence of Lady Mason would be conducted not only with zeal, but in that spirit of justice and truth for which the gentlemen opposite to him were so conspicuous in their profession. All this was wormwood to Joseph Mason; but nevertheless, though Sir Richard was so moderate as to his own side, and so courteous to that opposed to him, he made it very clear before he sat down that if those witnesses were prepared to swear that which he was instructed they would swear, either they must be utterly unworthy of credit—a fact which his learned friends opposite were as able to elicit as any gentlemen who had ever graced the English bar—or else the prisoner now on her trial must have been guilty of the crime of perjury now imputed to her.

Of all those in court now attending to the proceedings, none listened with greater care to the statement made by Sir Richard than Joseph Mason, Lady Mason herself, and Felix Graham. To Joseph Mason it appeared that his counsel was betraying him. Sir Richard and Round were in a boat together and were determined to throw him over yet once again. Had it

been possible he would have stopped the proceedings, and in this spirit he spoke to Dockwrath. To Joseph Mason it would have seemed right that Sir Richard should begin by holding up Lady Mason to the scorn and indignation of the twelve honest jurymen before him. Mr. Dockwrath, whose intelligence was keener in such matters, endeavoured to make his patron understand that he was wrong; but in this he did not succeed. "If he lets her escape me," said Mason, "I think it will be the death of me."

To Lady Mason it appeared as though the man who was now showing to all the crowd there assembled the chief scenes of her past life, had been present and seen everything that she had ever done. He told the jury of all who had been present in the room when that true deed had been signed; he described how old Usbech had sat there incapable of action; how that affair of the partnership had been brought to a close; how those two witnesses had thereupon appended their names to a deed; how those witnesses had been deceived, or partially deceived, as to their own signatures when called upon to give their testimony at a former trial; and he told them also that a comparison of the signatures on the codicil with those signatures which were undoubtedly true would lead an expert and professional judge of writing to tell them that the one set of signatures or the other must be forgeries. Then he went on to describe how the pretended codicil must in truth have been executed—speaking of the solitary room in which the bad work had been done, of the midnight care and terrible solicitude for secrecy. And then, with apparent mercy, he attempted to mitigate the iniquity of the deed by telling the jury that it had not been done by that lady with any view to self-aggrandisement, but had

been brought about by a lamentable, infatuated, mad idea that she might in this way do that justice to her child which that child's father had refused to do at her instance. He also, when he told of this, spoke of Rebekah and her son; and Mrs. Orme when she heard him did not dare to raise her eyes from the table. Lucius Mason, when he had listened to this, lifted his clenched hand on high, and brought it down with loud violence on the raised desk in front of him. "I know the merits of that young man," said Sir Richard, looking at him; "I am told that he is a gentleman, good, industrious, and high spirited. I wish he were not here; I wish with all my heart he were not here." And then a tear, an absolute and true drop of briny moisture, stood in the eye of that old experienced lawyer. Lucius, when he heard this, for a moment covered his face. It was but for a moment, and then he looked up again, turning his eyes slowly round the entire court, and as he did so grasping his mother by the arm. "He'll look in a different sort of fashion by to-morrow evening, I guess," said Dockwrath into his neighbour's ear. During all this time no change came over our Lady Mason's face.

When she felt her son's hand upon her arm her muscles had moved involuntarily; but she recovered herself at the moment, and then went on enduring it all with absolute composure. Nevertheless it seemed to her as though that man who stood before her, telling his tale so calmly, had read the secrets of her very soul. What chance could there be for her when everything was thus known?

To every word that was spoken Felix Graham gave all his mind. While Mr. Chaffanbrass sat fidgeting, or reading, or dreaming, caring nothing for all that his

learned brother might say, Graham listened to every fact that was stated, and to every surmise that was propounded. To him the absolute truth in this affair was matter of great moment, but yet he felt that he dreaded to know the truth. Would it not be better for him that he should not know it? But yet he listened, and his active mind, intent on the various points as they were evolved, would not restrain itself from forming opinions. With all his ears he listened, and as he did so Mr. Chaffanbrass, amidst his dreaming, reading, and fidgeting, kept an attentive eye upon him. To him it was a matter of course that Lady Mason should be guilty. Had she not been guilty, he, Mr. Chaffanbrass, would not have been required. Mr. Chaffanbrass well understood that the defence of injured innocence was no part of his mission.

Then at last Sir Richard Leatherham brought to a close his long tale, and the examination of the witnesses was commenced. By this time it was past two o'clock, and the judge went out of court for a few minutes to refresh himself with a glass of wine and a sandwich. And now young Peregrine Orme, in spite of all obstacles, made his way up to his mother and led her also out of court. He took his mother's arm, and Lady Mason followed with her son, and so they made their way into the small outer room which they had first entered. Not a word was said between them on the subject that was filling the minds of all of them. Lucius stood silent and absorbed while Peregrine offered refreshment to both the ladies. Lady Mason, doing as she was bid, essayed to eat and to drink. What was it to her whether she ate and drank or was a-hungered? To maintain by her demeanour the idea in men's minds that she might still possibly be inno-

cent—that was her work. And therefore, in order that those two young men might still think so, she ate and drank as she was bidden.

On their return to court Mr. Steelyard got up to examine Dockwrath, who was put into the box as the first witness. The attorney produced certain documents supposed to be of relevancy, which he had found among his father-in-law's papers, and then described how he had found that special document which gave him to understand that Bolster and Kenneby had been used as witnesses to a certain signature on that 14th of July. He had known all the circumstances of the old trial, and hence his suspicions had been aroused. Acting upon this he had gone immediately down to Mr. Mason in Yorkshire, and the present trial was the result of his care and intelligence. This was in effect the purport of his direct evidence, and then he was handed over to the tender mercies of the other side.

On the other side Mr. Chaffanbrass rose to begin the battle. Mr. Furnival had already been engaged in sundry of those preliminary skirmishes which had been found necessary before the fight had been commenced in earnest, and therefore the turn had now come for Mr. Chaffanbrass. All this, however, had been arranged beforehand, and it had been agreed that if possible Dockwrath should be made to fall into the clutches of the Old Bailey barrister. It was pretty to see the meek way in which Mr. Chaffanbrass rose to his work; how gently he smiled, how he fidgeted about a few of the papers as though he were not at first quite master of his situation, and how he arranged his old wig in a modest, becoming manner, bringing it well forward over his forehead. His voice also was low and soft;—so low that it was hardly heard through the

whole court, and persons who had come far to listen to him began to feel themselves disappointed. And it was pretty also to see how Dockwrath armed himself for the encounter,—how he sharpened his teeth, as it were, and felt the points of his own claws. The little devices of Mr. Chaffanbrass did not deceive him. He knew what he had to expect; but his pluck was good, as is the pluck of a terrier when a mastiff prepares to attack him. Let Mr. Chaffanbrass do his worst; that would all be over in an hour or so. But when Mr. Chaffanbrass had done his worst, Orley Farm would still remain.

"I believe you were a tenant of Lady Mason's at one time, Mr. Dockwrath?" asked the barrister.

"I was; and she turned me out. If you will allow me I will tell you how all that happened, and how I was angered by the usage I received." Mr. Dockwrath was determined to make a clean breast of it, and rather go before his tormentor in telling all that there was to be told, than lag behind as an unwilling witness.

"Do," said Mr. Chaffanbrass. "That will be very kind of you. When I have learned all that, and one other little circumstance of the same nature, I do not think I shall want to trouble you any more." And then Mr. Dockwrath did tell it all;—how he had lost the two fields, how he had thus become very angry, how this anger had induced him at once to do that which he had long thought of doing,—search, namely, among the papers of old Mr. Usbech, with the view of ascertaining what might be the real truth as regarded that doubtful codicil.

"And you found what you searched for, Mr. Dockwrath?"

"I did," said Dockwrath.

"Without very much delay, apparently?"

"I was two or three days over the work."

"But you found exactly what you wanted?"

"I found what I expected to find."

"And that, although all those papers had been subjected to the scrutiny of Messrs. Round and Crook at the time of that other trial twenty years ago?"

"I was sharper than them, Mr. Chaffanbrass, a deal sharper."

"So I perceive," said Chaffanbrass, and now he had pushed back his wig a little, and his eyes had begun to glare with an ugly red light. "Yes," he said, "it will be long, I think, before my old friends Round and Crook are as sharp as you are, Mr. Dockwrath."

"Upon my word I agree with you, Mr. Chaffanbrass."

"Yes; Round and Crook are babies to you, Mr. Dockwrath;" and now Mr. Chaffanbrass began to pick at his chin with his finger, as he was accustomed to do when he warmed to his subject. "Babies to you! You have had a good deal to do with them, I should say, in getting up this case?"

"I have had something to do with them."

"And very much they must have enjoyed your society, Mr. Dockwrath! And what wrinkles they must have learned from you! What a pleasant oasis it must have been in the generally somewhat dull course of their monotonous though profitable business! I quite envy Round and Crook having you alongside of them in their inner council-chamber!"

"I know nothing about that, Sir."

"No; I dare say you don't;—but they'll remember it. Well, when you turned over your father-in-law's papers for three days you found what you looked for?"

"Yes, I did."

" You had been tolerably sure that you would find it before you began, eh?"

" Well, I had expected that something would turn up."

" I have no doubt you did,—and something has turned up. That gentleman sitting next to you there,—who is he?"

" Joseph Mason, Esquire, of Groby Park," said Dockwrath.

" So I thought. It is he that is to have Orley Farm, if Lady Mason and her son should lose it?"

" In that case he would be the heir."

" Exactly. He would be the heir. How pleasant it must be to you to find yourself on such affectionate terms with—the heir! And when he comes into his inheritance, who is to be tenant? Can you tell us that?"

Dockwrath here paused for a moment. Not that he hesitated as to telling the whole truth. He had fully made up his mind to do so, and to brazen the matter out, declaring that of course he was to be considered worthy of his reward. But there was that in the manner and eye of Chaffanbrass which stopped him for a moment, and his enemy immediately took advantage of this hesitation. " Come, Sir," said he, " out with it. If I don't get it from you, I shall from somebody else. You've been very plain spoken hitherto. Don't let the jury think that your heart is failing you at last."

" There is no reason why my heart should fail me," said Dockwrath, in an angry tone.

" Is there not? I must differ from you there, Mr. Dockwrath. The heart of any man placed in such a position as that you now hold must, I think, fail him.

But never mind that. Who is to be the tenant of Orley Farm when my client has been deprived of it?"

"I am."

"Just so. You were turned out of those two fields when young Mason came home from Germany?"

"I was."

"You immediately went to work and discovered this document?"

"I did."

"You put up Joseph Mason to this trial?"

"I told him my opinion."

"Exactly. And if the result be successful, you are to be put in possession of the land."

"I shall become Mr. Mason's tenant at Orley Farm."

"Yes, you will become Mr. Mason's tenant at Orley Farm. Upon my word, Mr. Dockwrath, you have made my work to-day uncommonly easy for me,—uncommonly easy. I don't know that I have anything else to ask you." And then Mr. Chaffanbrass, as he sat down, looked up to the jury with an expression of countenance which was in itself worth any fee that could be paid to him for that day's work. His face spoke as plain as a face could speak, and what his face said was this: "After that, gentlemen of the jury, very little more can be necessary. You now see the motives of our opponents, and the way in which those motives have been allowed to act. We, who are altogether upon the square in what we are doing, desire nothing more than that." All which Mr. Chaffanbrass said by his look, his shrug, and his gesture, much more eloquently than he could have done by the use of any words.

Mr. Dockwrath, as he left the box and went back to his seat—in doing which he had to cross the table in the middle of the court—endeavoured to look and

move as though all were right with him. He knew that the eyes of the court were on him, and especially the eyes of the judge and jury. He knew also how men's minds are unconsciously swayed by small appearances. He endeavoured therefore to seem indifferent; but in doing so he swaggered, and was conscious that he swaggered; and he felt as he gained his seat that Mr. Chaffanbrass had been too much for him.

Then one Mr. Torrington from London was examined by Sir Richard Leatherham, and he proved, apparently beyond all doubt, that a certain deed which he produced was genuine. That deed bore the same date as the codicil which was now questioned, had been executed at Orley Farm by old Sir Joseph, and bore the signatures of John Kenneby and Bridget Bolster as witnesses. Sir Richard, holding the deed in his hands, explained to the jury that he did not at the present stage of the proceedings ask them to take it as proved that those names were the true signatures of the two persons indicated. ("I should think not," said Mr. Furnival, in a loud voice.) But he asked them to satisfy themselves that the document as now existing purported to bear those two signatures. It would be for them to judge, when the evidence brought before them should be complete, whether or no that deed was a true document. And then the deed was handed up into the jury-box, and the twelve jurymen all examined it. The statement made by this Mr. Torrington was very simple. It had become his business to know the circumstances of the late partnership between Mason and Martock, and these circumstances he explained. Then Sir Richard handed him over to be cross-examined.

It was now Graham's turn to begin his work; but as he rose to do so his mind misgave him. Not a syllable

that this Torrington had said appeared to him to be unworthy of belief. The man had not uttered a word, of the truth of which Graham did not feel himself positively assured; and, more than that,—the man had clearly told all that was within him to tell, all that it was well that the jury should hear in order that they might thereby be assisted in coming to a true decision. It had been hinted in his hearing, both by Chaffanbrass and Aram, that this man was probably in league with Dockwrath, and Aram had declared with a sneer that he was a puzzle-pated old fellow. He might be puzzle-pated, and had already shown that he was bashful and unhappy in his present position; but he had shown also, as Graham thought, that he was anxious to tell the truth.

And, moreover, Graham had listened with all his mind to the cross-examination of Dockwrath, and he was filled with disgust—with disgust, not so much at the part played by the attorney as at that played by the barrister. As Graham regarded the matter, what had the iniquities and greed of Dockwrath to do with it? Had reason been shown why the statement made by Dockwrath was in itself unworthy of belief,—that that statement was in its own essence weak,—then the character of the man making it might fairly affect its credibility. But presuming that statement to be strong,—presuming that it was corroborated by other evidence, how could it be affected by any amount of villainy on the part of Dockwrath? All that Chaffanbrass had done or attempted was to prove that Dockwrath had had his own end to serve. Who had ever doubted it? But not a word had been said, not a spark of evidence elicited, to show that the man had used a falsehood to further those views of his. Of all this the mind of Felix

Graham had been full; and now, as he rose to take his own share of the work, his wit was at work rather in opposition to Lady Mason than on her behalf.

This Torrington was a little old man, and Graham had watched how his hands had trembled when Sir Richard first addressed him. But Sir Richard had been very kind,—as was natural to his own witness, and the old man had gradually regained his courage. But now as he turned his face round to the side where he knew that he might expect to find an enemy, that tremor again came upon him, and the stick which he held in his hand was heard as it tapped gently against the side of the witness-box. Graham, as he rose to his work, saw that Mr. Chaffanbrass had fixed his eye upon him, and his courage rose the higher within him as he felt the gaze of the man whom he so much disliked. Was it within the compass of his heart to bully an old man because such a one as Chaffanbrass desired it of him? By Heaven, no!

He first asked Mr. Torrington his age, and having been told that he was over seventy, Graham went on to assure him that nothing which could be avoided should be said to disturb his comfort. "And now, Mr. Torrington," he asked, "will you tell me whether you are a friend of Mr. Dockwrath's, or have had any acquaintance with him previous to the affairs of this trial?" This question he repeated in various forms, but always in a mild voice, and without the appearance of any disbelief in the answers which were given to him. All these questions Torrington answered by a plain negative. He had never seen Dockwrath till the attorney had come to him on the matter of that partnership deed. He had never eaten or drunk with him, nor had there ever been between them any conversation of

a confidential nature. "That will do, Mr. Torrington," said Graham; and as he sat down, he again turned round and looked Mr. Chaffanbrass full in the face.

After that nothing further of interest was done that day. A few unimportant witnesses were examined on legal points, and then the court was adjourned.

CHAPTER XV

THE TWO JUDGES

FELIX GRAHAM as he left the Alston court-house on the close of the first day of the trial was not in a happy state of mind. He did not actually accuse himself of having omitted any duty which he owed to his client; but he did accuse himself of having undertaken a duty for which he felt himself to be manifestly unfit. Would it not have been better, as he said to himself, for that poor lady to have had any other possible advocate than himself? Then as he passed out in the company of Mr. Furnival and Mr. Chaffanbrass, the latter looked at him with a scorn which he did not know how to return. In his heart he could do so; and should words be spoken between them on the subject, he would be well able and willing enough to defend himself. But had he attempted to bandy looks with Mr. Chaffanbrass, it would have seemed even to himself that he was proclaiming his resolution to put himself in opposition to his colleagues.

He felt as though he were engaged to fight a battle in which truth and justice, nay, Heaven itself must be against him. How can a man put his heart to the proof of an assertion in the truth of which he himself has no belief? That though guilty this lady should be treated with the utmost mercy compatible with the law;—for so much, had her guilt stood forward as acknowledged, he could have pleaded with all the eloquence that was in

him. He could still pity her, sympathize with her, fight for her on such ground as that; but was it possible that he, believing her to be false, should stand up before the crowd assembled in that court, and use such intellect as God had given him in making others think that the false and the guilty one was true and innocent, and that those accusers were false and guilty whom he knew to be true and innocent?

It had been arranged that Baron Maltby should stay that night at Noningsby. The brother-judges therefore occupied the Noningsby carriage together, and Graham was driven back in a dog-cart by Augustus Staveley.

"Well, old boy," said Augustus, "you did not soil your conscience much by bullying that fellow."

"No, I did not," said Graham; and then he was silent.

"Chaffanbrass made an uncommonly ugly show of the Hamworth attorney," said Augustus, after a pause; but to this Graham at first made no answer.

"If I were on the jury," continued the other, "I would not believe a single word that came from that fellow's mouth, unless it were fully supported by other testimony. Nor will the jury believe him."

"I tell you what, Staveley," said Graham, "you will oblige me greatly in this matter if you will not speak to me of the trial till it is over."

"I beg your pardon."

"No; don't do that. Nothing can be more natural than that you and I should discuss it together in all its bearings. But there are reasons which I will explain to you afterwards, why I would rather not do so."

"All right," said Augustus. "I'll not say another word."

"And for my part, I will get through the work as

well as I may." And then they both sat silent in the gig till they came to the corner of Noningsby wall.

"And is that other subject tabooed also?" said Augustus.

"What other subject?"

"That as to which we said something when you were last here,—touching my sister Madeline."

Graham felt that his face was on fire, but he did not know how to answer. "In that it is for you to decide whether or no there should be silence between us," he said at last.

"I certainly do not wish that there should be any secret between us," said Augustus.

"Then there shall be none. It is my intention to make an offer to her before I leave Noningsby. I can assure you for your satisfaction, that my hopes do not run very high."

"For my satisfaction, Felix! I don't know why you should suppose me to be anxious that you should fail." And as he so spoke he stopped his horse at the hall-door and there was no time for further speech.

"Papa has been home a quarter of an hour," said Madeline, meeting them in the hall.

"Yes, he had the pull of us by having his carriage ready," said her brother. "We had to wait for the ostler."

"He says that if you are not ready in ten minutes he will go to dinner without you. Mamma and I are dressed." And as she spoke she turned round with a smile to Felix, making him feel that both she and her father were treating him as though he were one of the family.

"Ten minutes will be quite enough for me," said he.

"If the governor only would sit down," said Augustus, "it would be all right. But that's just what he won't do. Mad., do send somebody to help me to unpack." And then they all bustled away so that the pair of judges might not be kept waiting for their food.

Felix Graham hurried up stairs, three steps at a time, as though all his future success at Noningsby depended on his being down in the drawing-room within the period of minutes stipulated by the judge. As he dressed himself with the utmost rapidity, thinking perhaps not so much as he should have done of his appearance in the eyes of his lady-love, he endeavoured to come to some resolve as to the task which was before him. How was he to find an opportunity of speaking his mind to Madeline, if, during the short period of his sojourn at Noningsby, he left the house every morning directly after breakfast, and returned to it in the evening only just in time for dinner?

When he entered the drawing-room both the judges were there, as was also Lady Staveley and Madeline. Augustus alone was wanting. "Ring the bell, Graham," the judge said, as Felix took his place on the corner of the rug. "Augustus will be down about supper-time." And then the bell was rung and the dinner ordered.

"Papa ought to remember," said Madeline, "that he got his carriage first at Alston."

"I heard the wheels of the gigs," said the judge. "They were just two minutes after us."

"I don't think Augustus takes longer than other young men," said Lady Staveley.

"Look at Graham there. He can't be supposed to

have the use of all his limbs, for he broke half a dozen of them a month ago; and yet he's ready. Brother Maltby, give your arm to Lady Staveley. Graham, if you'll take Madeline, I'll follow alone." He did not call her Miss Staveley, as Felix specially remarked, and so remarking, pressed the little hand somewhat closer to his side. It was the first sign of love he had ever given her, and he feared that some mark of anger might follow it. There was no return to his pressure; —not the slightest answer was made with those sweet finger points; but there was no anger. "Is your arm quite strong again?" she asked him as they sat down, as soon as the judge's short grace had been uttered.

"Fifteen minutes to the second," said Augustus, bustling into the room, "and I think that an unfair advantage has been taken of me. But what can a juvenile barrister expect in the presence of two judges?" And then the dinner went on, and a very pleasant little dinner-party it was.

Not a word was said, either then or during the evening, or on the following morning, on that subject which was engrossing so much of the mind of all of them. Not a word was spoken as to that trial which was now pending, nor was the name of Lady Mason mentioned. It was understood even by Madeline that no allusion could with propriety be made to it in the presence of the judge before whom the cause was now pending, and the ground was considered too sacred for feet to tread upon it. Were it not that this feeling is so general an English judge and English counsellors would almost be forced to subject themselves in such cases to the close custody which jurymen are called upon to endure. But, as a rule, good taste and good feeling are as potent as locks and walls.

"Do you know, Mr. Graham," said Madeline, in that sort of whisper which the dinner-table allows, "that Mrs. Baker says you have cut her since you got well?"

"I! I cut one of my very best friends! How can she say anything so untrue? If I knew where she lived I'd go and pay her a visit after dinner."

"I don't think you need do that,—though she has a very snug little room of her own. You were in it on Christmas-day when we had the snapdragon,—when you and Marion carried away the dishes."

"I remember. And she is base enough to say that I have cut her? I did see her for a moment yesterday, and then I spoke to her."

"Ah, but you should have had a long chat with her. She expects you to go back over all the old ground, how you were brought in helpless, how the doctor came to you, and how you took all the messes she prepared for you like a good boy. I'm afraid, Mr. Graham, you don't understand old women."

"Nor young ones either," it was on his tongue to say, but he did not say it.

"When I was a young man," said the baron, carrying on some conversation which had been general at the table, "I never had an opportunity of breaking my ribs out hunting."

"Perhaps if you had," said Augustus, "you might have used it with more effect than my friend here, and have deprived the age of one of its brightest lights, and the bench of one of its most splendid ornaments."

"Hear, hear, hear!" said his father.

"Augustus is coming out in a new character," said his mother.

"I am heartily obliged to him," said the baron.

"But, as I was saying before, these sort of things never came in my way. If I remember right my father would have thought I was mad had I talked of going out hunting. Did you hunt, Staveley?"

When the ladies were gone the four lawyers talked about law, though they kept quite clear of that special trial which was going on at Alston. Judge Staveley, as we know, had been at the Birmingham congress; but not so his brother the baron. Baron Maltby, indeed, thought but little of the Birmingham doings, and was inclined to be a little hard upon his brother in that he had taken a part in it.

"I think that the matter is one open to discussion," said the host.

"Well, I hope so," said Graham. "At any rate, I have heard no arguments which ought to make us feel that our mouths are closed."

"Arguments on such a matter are worth nothing at all," said the baron. "A man with what is called a logical turn of mind may prove anything or disprove anything; but he never convinces anybody. On any matter that is near to a man's heart, he is convinced by the tenor of his own thoughts as he goes on living, not by the arguments of a logician, or even by the eloquence of an orator. Talkers are apt to think that if their listener cannot answer them they are bound to give way; but non-talkers generally take a very different view of the subject."

"But does that go to show that a question should not be ventilated?" asked Felix.,

"I don't mean to be uncivil," said the baron, "but of all words in the language there is none which I dislike so much as that word ventilation. A man given to

ventilating subjects is worse than a man who has a mission."

"Bores of that sort, however," said Graham, "will show themselves from time to time and are not easily put down. Some one will have a mission to reform our courts of law, and will do it too."

"I only hope it may not be in my time," said the baron.

"I can't go quite so far as that," said the other judge. "But no doubt we all have the same feeling more or less. I know pretty well what my friend Graham is driving at."

"And in your heart you agree with me," said Graham.

"If you would carry men's heads with you they would do you more good than their hearts," said the judge. And then as the wine bottles were stationary, the subject was cut short, and they went into the drawing-room.

Graham had no opportunity that evening of telling his tale to Madeline Staveley. The party was too large for such tale-telling or else not large enough. And then the evening in the drawing-room was over before it had seemed to begin; and while he was yet hoping that there might be some turn in his favour, Lady Staveley wished him good-night and Madeline of course did the same. As he again pressed her hand he could not but think how little he had said to her since he had been in the house, and yet it seemed to him as though that little had made him more intimate with her than he had ever found himself before. He had made an attempt to separate himself from the company by proposing to go and call on Mrs. Baker in her own quarters; but Madeline had declared it to be too late for such an expedition, explaining that when Mrs. Baker had no patient on hand she was accustomed to go early to her bed.

In the present instance, however, she had been wrong, for when Felix reached the door of his own room, Mrs. Baker was coming out of it.

"I was just looking if everything was right," said she. "It seems natural to me to come and look after you, you know."

"And it is quite as natural for me to be looked after."

"Is it though? But the worst of you gentlemen when you get well is that one has done with you. You go away, and then there's no more about it. I always begrudge to see you get well for that reason."

"When you have a man in your power you like to keep him there."

"That's always the way with the women you know, I hope we shall see one of them tying you by the leg altogether before long."

"I don't know anything about that," said Felix sheepishly.

"Don't you? Well, if you don't I suppose nobody don't. But nevertheless I did hear a little bird say—eh, Mr. Graham?"

"Those little birds are the biggest liars in the world."

"Are they now? Well, perhaps they are. And how do you think our Miss Madeline is looking? She wasn't just well for one short time after you went away."

"Has she been ill?"

"Well, not ill; not so that she came into my hands. She's looking herself again now, isn't she?"

"She is looking, as she always does, uncommonly well."

"Do you remember how she used to come and say a word to you standing at the door? Dear heart! I'll be bound now I care more for her than you do."

"Do you?" said Graham.

"Of course I do. And then how angry her ladyship was with me—as though it were my fault. I didn't do it. Did I, Mr. Graham? But Lord love you, what's the use of being angry? My lady ought to have remembered her own young days, for it was just the same thing with her. She had her own way and so will Miss Madeline." And then with some further inquiries as to his fire, his towels, and his sheets, Mrs. Baker took herself off.

Felix Graham had felt a repugnance to taking the gossiping old woman openly into his confidence, and yet he had almost asked her whether he might in truth count upon Madeline's love. Such at any rate had been the tenor of his gossiping; but nevertheless he was by no means certified. He had the judge's assurance in allowing him to be there; he had the assurance given to him by Augustus in the few words spoken to him at the door that evening; and he ought to have known that he had received sufficient assurance from Madeline herself. But in truth he knew nothing of the kind. There are men who are much too forward in believing that they are regarded with favour; but there are others of whom it may be said that they are as much too backward. The world hears most of the former, and talks of them the most, but I doubt whether the latter are not the more numerous.

The next morning of course there was a hurry and fuss at breakfast in order that they might get off in time for the courts. The judges were to take their seats at ten, and therefore it was necessary that they should sit down to breakfast some time before nine. The achievement does not seem to be one of great difficulty, but nevertheless it left no time for love-making.

But for one instant Felix was able to catch Madeline alone in the breakfast-parlour. "Miss Stavely," said he, "will it be possible that I should speak to you alone this evening;—for five minutes?"

"Speak to me alone?" she said, repeating his words; and as she did so she was conscious that her whole face had become suffused with colour.

"Is it too much to ask?"

"Oh, no!"

"Then if I leave the dining-room soon after you have done so——"

"Mamma will be there, you know," she said. Then others came into the room and he was able to make no further stipulation for the evening.

Madeline, when she was left alone that morning, was by no means satisfied with her own behaviour, and accused herself of having been unnecessarily cold to him. She knew the permission which had been accorded to him, and she knew also—knew well—what answer would be given to his request. In her mind the matter was now fixed. She had confessed to herself that she loved him, and she could not now doubt of his love to her. Why then should she have answered him with coldness and doubt? She hated the missishness of young ladies, and had resolved that when he asked her a plain question she would give him a plain answer. It was true that the question had not been asked as yet; but why should she have left him in doubt as to her kindly feeling?

"It shall be but for this one day," she said to herself as she sat alone in her room.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW AM I TO BEAR IT?

WHEN the first day's work was over in the court, Lady Mason and Mrs. Orme kept their seats till the greater part of the crowd had dispersed, and the two young men, Lucius Mason and Peregrine, remained with them. Mr. Aram also remained, giving them sundry little instructions in a low voice as to the manner in which they should go home and return the next morning—telling them the hour at which they must start, and promising that he would meet them at the door of the court. To all this Mrs. Orme endeavoured to give her best attention, as though it were of the last importance; but Lady Mason was apparently much the more collected of the two, and seemed to take all Mr. Aram's courtesies as though they were a matter of course. There she sat, still with her veil up, and though all those who had been assembled there during the day turned their eyes upon her as they passed out, she bore it all without quailing. It was not that she returned their gaze, or affected an effrontery in her conduct; but she was able to endure it without showing that she suffered as she did so.

"The carriage is there now," said Mr. Aram, who had left the court for a minute; "and I think you may get into it quietly." This accordingly they did, making their way through an avenue of idlers who still remained that they might look upon the lady who was accused of having forged her husband's will.

"I will stay with her to-night," whispered Mrs. Orme to her son as they passed through the court.

"Do you mean that you will not come to The Cleeve at all?"

"Not to-night, not till the trial be over. Do you remain with your grandfather."

"I shall be here to-morrow of course to see how you go on."

"But do not leave your grandfather this evening. Give him my love, and say that I think it best that I should remain at Orley Farm till the trial be over. And, Peregrine, if I were you I would not talk to him much about the trial."

"But why not?"

"I will tell you when it is over. But it would only harass him at the present moment." And then Peregrine handed his mother into the carriage and took his own way back to The Cleeve.

As he returned he was bewildered in his mind by what he had heard, and he also began to feel something like a doubt as to Lady Mason's innocence. Hitherto his belief in it had been as fixed and assured as that of her own son. Indeed it had never occurred to him as possible that she could have done the thing with which she was charged. He had hated Joseph Mason for suspecting her, and had hated Dockwrath for his presumed falsehood in pretending to suspect her. But what was he to think of this question now, after hearing the clear and dispassionate statement of all the circumstances by the solicitor-general? Hitherto he had understood none of the particulars of the case; but now the nature of the accusation had been made plain, and it was evident to him that at any rate that far-sighted lawyer believed in the truth of his own state-

ment. Could it be possible that Lady Mason had forged the will—that this deed had been done by his mother's friend, by the woman who had so nearly become Lady Orme of The Cleeve? The idea was terrible to him as he rode home, but yet he could not rid himself of it. And if this were so, was it also possible that his grandfather suspected it? Had that marriage been stopped by any such suspicion as this? Was it this that had broken the old man down and robbed him of all his spirit? That his mother could not have any such suspicion seemed to him to be made clear by the fact that she still treated Lady Mason as her friend. And then why had he been specially enjoined not to speak to his grandfather as to the details of the trial?

But it was impossible for him to meet Sir Peregrine without speaking of the trial. When he entered the house, which he did by some back entrance from the stables, he found his grandfather standing at his own room door. He had heard the sounds of the horse, and was unable to restrain his anxiety to learn.

"Well," said Sir Peregrine, "what has happened?"

"It is not over as yet. It will last, they say, for three days."

"But come in, Peregrine;" and he shut the door, anxious rather that the servants should not witness his own anxiety than that they should not hear tidings which must now be common to all the world. "They have begun it?"

"Oh, yes! they have begun it."

"Well, how far has it gone?"

"Sir Richard Leatherham told us the accusation they make against her, and then they examined Dockwrath and one or two others. They have not got further than that."

"And the—Lady Mason—how does she bear it?"

"Very well, I should say. She does not seem to be nearly as nervous now, as she was while staying with us."

"Ah! indeed. She is a wonderful woman—a very wonderful woman. So she bears up? And your mother, Peregrine?"

"I don't think she likes it."

"Likes it! Who could like such a task as that?"

"But she will go through with it."

"I am sure she will. She will go through with anything that she undertakes. And—and—the judge said nothing—I suppose?"

"Very little, Sir."

And Sir Peregrine again sat down in his arm-chair as though the work of conversation were too much for him. But neither did he dare to speak openly on the subject; and yet there was so much that he was anxious to know. Do you think she will escape? That was the question which he longed to ask but did not dare to utter.

And then, after a while, they dined together. And Peregrine determined to talk of other things; but it was in vain. While the servants were in the room nothing was said. The meat was carved and the plates were handed round, and young Orme ate his dinner; but there was a constraint upon them both which they were quite unable to dispel, and at last they gave it up and sat in silence till they were alone.

When the door was closed, and they were opposite to each other over the fire, in the way which was their custom when they two only were there, Sir Peregrine could restrain his desire no longer. It must be that his grandson, who had heard all that had passed in court

that day, should have formed some opinion of what was going on,—should have some idea as to the chance of that battle which was being fought. He, Sir Peregrine, could not have gone into the court himself. It would have been impossible for him to show himself there. But there had been his heart all the day. How had it gone with that woman whom a few weeks ago he had loved so well that he had regarded her as his wife?

“Was your mother very tired?” he said, again endeavouring to draw near the subject.

“She did look fagged while sitting in court.”

“It was a dreadful task for her,—very dreadful.”

“Nothing could have turned her from it,” said Peregrine.

“No,—you are right there. Nothing would have turned her from it. She thought it to be her duty to that poor lady. But she—Lady Mason—she bore it better, you say?”

“I think she bears it very well considering what her position is.”

“Yes, yes. It is very dreadful. The solicitor-general when he opened,—was he very severe upon her?”

“I do not think he wished to be severe.”

“But he made it very strong against her.”

“The story as he told it, was very strong against her;—that is, you know, it would be if we were to believe all that he stated.”

“Yes, yes, of course. He only stated what he has been told by others. You could not see how the jury took it?”

“I did not look at them. I was thinking more of her and of Lucius.”

“Lucius was there?”

"Yes; he sat next to her. And Sir Richard said, while he was telling the story, that he wished her son were not there to hear it. Upon my word, Sir, I almost wished so too."

"Poor fellow,—poor fellow! It would have been better for him to stay away."

"And yet had it been my mother——"

"Your mother, Perry! It could not have been your mother. She could not have been so placed."

"If it be Lady Mason's misfortune, and not her fault——"

"Ah, well! we will not talk about that. And there will be two days more you say?"

"So said Aram, the attorney."

"God help her;—may God help her! It would be very dreadful for a man, but for a woman the burden is insupportable."

Then they both sat silent for a while, during which Peregrine was engrossed in thinking how he could turn his grandfather from the conversation.

"And you heard no one express any opinion?" asked Sir Peregrine, after a pause.

"You mean about Lady Mason?" And Peregrine began to perceive that his mother was right, and that it would have been well if possible to avoid any words about the trial.

"Do they think that she will,—will be acquitted? Of course the people there were talking about it?"

"Yes, Sir, they were talking about it. But I really don't know as to any opinion. You see the chief witnesses have not been examined."

"And you, Perry, what do you think?"

"I, Sir! Well, I was altogether on her side till I heard Sir Richard Leatherham."

"And then——?"

"Then I did not know what to think. I suppose it's all right; but one never can understand what those lawyers are at. When Mr. Chaffanbrass got up to examine Dockwrath, he seemed to be just as confident on his side as the other fellow had been on the other side. I don't think I'll have any more wine, Sir, thank you."

But Sir Peregrine did not move. He sat in his old accustomed way, nursing one leg over the knee of the other, and thinking of the manner in which she had fallen at his feet, and confessed it all. Had he married her, and gone with her proudly into the court,—as he would have done,—and had he then heard a verdict of guilty given by the jury;—nay, had he heard such proof of her guilt as would have convinced himself, it would have killed him. He felt, as he sat there safe over his own fireside, that his safety was due to her generosity. Had that other calamity fallen upon him, he could not have survived it. His head would have fallen low before the eyes of those who had known him since they had known anything, and would never have been raised again.

In his own spirit in his inner life, the blow had come to him; but it was due to her effort on his behalf that he had not been stricken in public. When he had discussed the matter with Mrs. Orme, he had seemed in a measure to forget this. It had not at any rate been the thought which rested with the greatest weight upon his mind. Then he had considered how she, whose life had been stainless as driven snow, should bear herself in the presence of such deep guilt. But now,—now as he sat alone, he thought only of Lady Mason. Let her be ever so guilty,—and her guilt had been very terrible,

—she had behaved very nobly to him. From him at least she had a right to sympathy.

And what chance was there that she should escape? Of absolute escape there was no chance whatever. Even should the jury acquit her, she must declare her guilt to the world,—must declare it to her son by taking steps for the restoration of the property. As to that, Sir Peregrine felt no doubt whatever. That Joseph Mason of Groby would recover his right to Orley Farm was to him a certainty. But how terrible would be the path over which she must walk before this deed of retribution could be done! “Ah, me! ah me!” he said as he thought of all this, speaking to himself as though he were unconscious of his grandson’s presence. “Poor woman! poor woman!” Then Peregrine felt sure that she had been guilty, and was sure also that his grandfather was aware of it.

“Will you come into the other room, Sir?” he said.

“Yes, yes; if you like it.” And then the one leg fell from the other, and he rose to do his grandson’s bidding. To him now and henceforward one room was much the same as another.

In the mean time the party bound for Orley Farm had reached that place, and to them also came the necessity of wearing through that tedious evening. On the mind of Lucius Mason not even yet had a shadow of suspicion fallen. To him in spite of it all, his mother was still pure. But yet he was stern to her, and his manner was very harsh. It may be that had such suspicion crossed his mind he would have been less stern, and his manner more tender. As it was he could understand nothing that was going on, and almost felt that he was kept in the dark at his mother’s instance. Why was it that a man respected by all the world, such as

Sir Richard Leatherham, should rise in court and tell such a tale as that against his mother; and that the power of answering that tale on his mother's behalf should be left to such another man as Mr. Chaffanbrass? Sir Richard had told his story plainly, but with terrible force, whereas Chaffanbrass had contented himself with browbeating another lawyer with the lowest quirks of his cunning. Why had not some one been in court able to use the language of passionate truth and ready to thrust the lie down the throats of those who told it?

Tea and supper had been prepared for them, and they sat down together; but the nature of the meal may be imagined. Lady Mason had striven with terrible effort to support herself during the day, and even yet she did not give way. It was quite as necessary that she should restrain herself before her son as before all those others who had gazed at her in court. And she did sustain herself. She took a knife and fork in her hand and ate a few morsels. She drank her cup of tea, and remembering that there in that house she was still hostess, she made some slight effort to welcome her guest. "Surely after such a day of trouble you will eat something," she said to her friend. To Mrs. Orme it was marvellous that the woman should even be alive,—let alone that she should speak and perform the ordinary functions of her daily life. "And now," she said—Lady Mason said—as soon as that ceremony was over, "now as we are so tired I think we will go up stairs. Will you light our candles for us, Lucius?" And so the candles were lit, and the two ladies went up stairs.

A second bed had been prepared in Lady Mason's room, and into this chamber they both went at once. Mrs. Orme, as soon as she had entered, turned round and held out both her hands in order that she might

comfort Lady Mason by taking hers; but Lady Mason, when she had closed the door, stood for a moment with her face towards the wall, not knowing how to bear herself. It was but for a moment, and then slowly moving round, with her two hands clasped together, she sank on her knees at Mrs. Orme's feet, and hid her face in the skirt of Mrs. Orme's dress.

"My friend—my friend!" said Lady Mason.

"Yes, I am your friend—indeed I am. But, dear Lady Mason—" And she endeavoured to think of words by which she might implore her to rise and compose herself.

"How is it you can bear with such a one as I am? How is it that you do not hate me for my guilt?"

"He does not hate us when we are guilty."

"I do not know. Sometimes I think that all will hate me,—here and hereafter—except you. Lucius will hate me, and how shall I bear that? Oh, Mrs. Orme, I wish he knew it."

"I wish he did. He shall know it now,—to-night, if you will allow me to tell him."

"No. It would kill me to bear his looks. I wish he knew it, and was away, so that he might never look at me again."

"He too would forgive you if he knew it all."

"Forgive! How can he forgive?" And as she spoke she rose again to her feet, and her old manner came upon her. "Do you think of what it is that I have done for him? I,—his mother,—for my only child? And after that, is it possible that he should forgive me?"

"You meant him no harm."

"But I have ruined him before all the world. He is as proud as your boy; and could he bear to think that

its whole life would be disgraced by his mother's crime?"

"Had I been so unfortunate he would have forgiven me."

"We are speaking of what is impossible. It could not have been so. Your youth was different from mine."

"God has been very good to me, and not placed temptation in my way;—temptation, I mean, to great faults. But little faults require repentance as much as great ones."

"But then repentance is easy; at any rate, it is possible."

"Oh, Lady Mason, is it not possible for you?"

"But I will not talk of that now. I will not hear you compare yourself with such a one as I am. Do you know I was thinking to-day that my mind would fail me, and that I should be mad before this is over? How can I bear it? how can I bear it?" And rising from her seat, she walked rapidly through the room, holding back her hair from her brows with both her hands.

And how was she to bear it? The load on her back was too much for any shoulders. The burden with which she had laden herself was too heavy to be borne. Her power of endurance was very great. Her strength in supporting the extreme bitterness of intense sorrow was wonderful. But now she was taxed beyond her power. "How am I to bear it?" she said again, as still holding her hair between her fingers, she drew her hands back over her head.

"You do not know. You have not tried it. It is impossible," she said in her wildness, as Mrs. Orme endeavoured to teach her the only source from whence consolation might be had. "I do not believe in the

thief on the cross, unless it was that he had prepared himself for that day by years of contrition. I know I shock you," she added, after a while. "I know that what I say will be dreadful to you. But innocence will always be shocked by guilt. Go, go and leave me. It has gone so far now that all is of no use." Then she threw herself on the bed, and burst into a convulsive passion of tears.

Once again Mrs. Orme endeavoured to obtain permission from her to undertake that embassy to her son. Had Lady Mason acceded, or been near acceding, Mrs. Orme's courage would probably have been greatly checked. As it was she pressed it as though the task were one to be performed without difficulty. Mrs. Orme was very anxious that Lucius should not sit in the court throughout the trial. She felt that if he did so the shock,—the shock which was inevitable,—must fall upon him there; and than that she could conceive nothing more terrible. And then also she believed that if the secret were once made known to Lucius and if he were for a time removed from his mother's side, the poor woman might be brought to a calmer perception of her true position. The strain would be lessened, and she would no longer feel the necessity of exerting so terrible a control over her felings.

"You have acknowledged that he must know it sooner or later," pleaded Mrs. Orme.

"But this is not the time,—not now, during the trial had he known it before——"

"It would keep him away from the court."

"Yes, and I should never see him again! What will he do when he hears it? Perhaps it would be better that he should go without seeing me."

"He would not do that."

"It would be better. If they take me to the prison I will never see him again. His eyes would kill me. Do you ever want him and see the pride that there is in his eyes? He has never yet known what disgrace means; and now I, his mother, have brought him to this!"

It was all in vain as far as that night was concerned. Lady Mason would give no such permission. But Mrs. Orme did exact from her a kind of promise that Louis should be told on the next evening, if it then appeared, from what Mr. Aram should say, that the result of the trial was likely to be against them.

Louis Mason spent his evening alone; and though he had as yet heard none of the truth, his mind was not at ease, nor was he happy at heart. Though he had no idea of his mother's guilt, he did conceive that after this trial it would be impossible that they should remain at Orley Farm. His mother's intended marriage with Sir Peregrine, and then the manner in which that engagement had been broken off; the course of the trial, and its celebrity; the enmity of Dockwra; and lastly, his own inability to place himself on terms of friendship with those people who were still his mother's nearest friends, made him feel that in any event it would be well for them to change their residence. What could life do for him there at Orley Farm, after all that had passed? He had gone to Liverpool and bought guano, and now the sacks were lying in his barn unopened. He had begun to drain, and the ugly unfinished lines of earth were lying across his fields. He had no further interest in it, and felt that he could no longer go to work on that ground as though he were in truth its master.

But then, as he thought of his future hopes, his place of residence and coming life, there was one other

beyond himself and his mother to whom his mind reverted. What would Sophia wish that he should do,—his own Sophia,—she who had promised him that her heart should be with his through all the troubles of this trial? Before he went to bed that night he wrote to Sophia, and told her what were his troubles and what his hopes. "This will be over in two days more," he said, "and then I will come to you. You will see me, I trust, the day after this letter reaches you; but, nevertheless, I cannot debar myself from the satisfaction of writing. I am not happy, for I am dissatisfied with what they are doing for my mother; and it is only when I think of you, and the assurance of your love, that I can feel anything like content. It is not a pleasant thing to sit by and hear one's mother charged with the foulest frauds that practised villains can conceive! Yet I have had to bear it, and have heard no denial of the charge in true honest language. To-day, when the solicitor-general was heaping falsehoods on her name, I could hardly refrain myself from rushing at his throat. Let me have a line of comfort from you, and then I will be with you on Friday."

That line of comfort never came, nor did Lucius on the Friday make his intended visit. Miss Furnival had determined, some day or two before this, that she would not write to Lucius again till this trial was over; and even then it might be a question whether a correspondence with the heir of Noningsby would not be more to her taste.

CHAPTER XVII

SHOWING HOW JOHN KENNEBY AND BRIDGET BOLSTER BORE THEMSELVES IN COURT

ON the next morning they were all in their places at ten o'clock, and the crowd had been gathered outside the doors of the court from a much earlier hour. As the trial progressed the interest in it increased, and as people began to believe that Lady Mason had in truth forged a will, so did they the more regard her in the light of a heroine. Had she murdered her husband after forging his will, men would have paid half a crown apiece to have touched her garments, or a guinea for the privilege of shaking hands with her. Lady Mason had again taken her seat with her veil raised, with Mrs. Orme on one side of her and her son on the other. The counsel were again ranged on the seats behind, Mr. Furnival sitting the nearest to the judge, and Mr. Aram again occupied the intermediate bench, so placing himself that he could communicate either with his client or with the barristers. These were now their established places, and great as was the crowd, they found no difficulty in reaching them. An easy way is always made for the chief performers in a play.

This was to be the great day as regarded the evidence. "It is a case that depends altogether on evidence," one young lawyer said to another. "If the counsel know how to handle the witnesses, I should say she is safe." The importance of this handling was felt by every one,

and therefore it was understood that the real game would be played out on this middle day. It had been all very well for Chaffanbrass to bully Dockwrath and make the wretched attorney miserable for an hour or so, but that would have but little bearing on the verdict. There were two persons there who were prepared to swear that on a certain day they had only signed one deed. So much the solicitor-general had told them, and nobody doubted that it would be so. The question now was this, would Mr. Furnival and Mr. Chaffanbrass succeed in making them contradict themselves when they had so sworn? Could they be made to say that they had signed two deeds, or that they might have done so?

It was again the duty of Mr. Furnival to come first upon the stage,—that is to say, he was to do so as soon as Sir Richard had performed his very second-rate part of eliciting the evidence in chief. Poor John Kenneby was to be the first victim, and he was placed in the box before them all, very soon after the judge had taken his seat. Why had he not emigrated to Australia, and escaped all this,—escaped all this, and Mrs. Smiley also? That was John Kenneby's reflection as he slowly mounted the two steps up into the place of his torture. Near to the same spot, and near also to Dockwrath, who had taken these two witnesses under his special charge, sat Bridget Bolster. She had made herself very comfortable that morning with buttered toast and sausages; and when at Dockwrath's instance Kenneby had submitted to a slight infusion of Dutch courage,—a bottle of brandy would not have sufficed for the purpose,—Bridget also had not refused the generous glass. "Not that I wants it," said she, meaning thereby to express an opinion that she could hold her own, even

against the great Chaffanbrass, without any such extraneous aid. She now sat quite quiet, with her hands crossed on her knees before her, and her eyes immovably fixed on the table which stood in the centre of the court. In that position she remained till her turn came; and one may say that there was no need for fear on account of Bridget Bolster.

And then Sir Richard began. What would be the nature of Kenneby's direct evidence the reader pretty well knows. Sir Richard took a long time in extracting it, for he was aware that it would be necessary to give his witness some confidence before he came to his main questions. Even to do this was difficult, for Kenneby would speak in a voice so low that nobody could hear him; and on the second occasion of the judge enjoining him to speak out, he nearly fainted. It is odd that it never occurs to judges that a witness who is naturally timid will be made more so by being scolded. When I hear a judge thus use his authority, I always wish that I had the power of forcing him to some very uncongenial employment,—jumping in a sack, let us say; and then when he jumped poorly, as he certainly would, I would crack my whip and bid him go higher and higher. The more I so bade him, the more he would jump; and the world looking on, would pity him and execrate me. It is much the same thing when a witness is sternly told to speak louder.

But John Kenneby at last told his plain story. He remembered the day on which he had met old Usbech, and Bridget Bolster, and Lady Mason in Sir Joseph's chamber. He had then witnessed a signature by Sir Joseph, and had only witnessed one on that day;—of that he was perfectly certain. He did not think that old Usbech had signed the deed in question, but on that

matter he declined to swear positively. He remembered the former trial. He had not then been able to swear positively whether Usbech had, or had not, signed the deed. As far as he could remember, that was the point to which his cross-examination on that occasion had chiefly been directed. So much John Kenneby did at last say in language that was sufficiently plain.

And then Mr. Furnival arose. The reader is acquainted with the state of his mind on the subject of this trial. The enthusiasm on behalf of Lady Mason, which had been aroused by his belief in her innocence, by his old friendship, by his ancient adherence to her cause, and by his admiration for her beauty, had now greatly faded. It had faded much when he found himself obliged to call in such fellow-labourers as Chaffanbrass and Aram, and had all but perished when he learned from contact with them to regard her guilt as certain. But, nevertheless, now that he was there, the old fire returned to him. He had wished twenty times that he had been able to shake the matter from him and leave his old client in the hands of her new advisers. It would be better for her, he had said to himself. But on this day—on these three days—seeing that he had not shaken the matter off, he rose to his work as though he still loved her, as though all his mind was still intent on preserving that ill-gotten inheritance for her son.

It may be almost doubted whether at moments during these three days he did not again persuade himself that she was an injured woman. Aram, as may be remembered, had felt misgivings as to Mr. Furnival's powers for such cross-examination; but Chaffanbrass had never doubted it. He knew that Mr. Furnival could do as much as himself in that way; the difference being

this,—that Mr. Furnival could do something else besides.

“And now, Mr. Kenneby, I’ll ask you a few questions,” he said: and Kenneby turned round to him. The barrister spoke in a mild low voice, but his eye transfixed the poor fellow at once; and though Kenneby was told a dozen times to look at the jury and speak to the jury, he never was able to take his gaze away from Mr. Furnival’s face.

“You remember the old trial,” he said; and as he spoke he held in his hand what was known to be an account of that transaction. Then there arose a debate between him and Sir Richard, in which Chaffan-brass, and Graham, and Mr. Steelyard all took part, as to whether Kenneby might be examined as to his former examination; and on this point Graham pleaded very volubly, bringing up precedents without number,—striving to do his duty to his client on a point with which his own conscience did not interfere. And at last it was ruled by the judge that this examination might go on;—whereupon both Sir Richard and Mr. Steelyard sat down as though they were perfectly satisfied. Kenneby, on being again asked, said that he did remember the old trial.

“It is necessary, you know, that the jury should hear you, and if you look at them and speak to them, they would stand a better chance.” Kenneby for a moment allowed his eye to travel up to the jury box, but it instantly fell again, and fixed itself on the lawyer’s face. “You do remember that trial?”

“Yes, Sir, I remember it,” whispered Kenneby.

“Do you remember my asking you then whether you had been in the habit of witnessing Sir Joseph Mason’s signature?”

"Did you ask me that, Sir?"

"That is the question which I put to you. Do you remember my doing so?"

"I dare say you did, Sir."

"I did, and I will now read your answer. We shall give to the jury a copy of the proceedings of that trial, my lord, when we have proved it,—as of course we intend to do."

And then there was another little battle between the barristers. But as Lady Mason was now being tried for perjury, alleged to have been committed at that other trial, it was of course indispensable that all the proceedings of that trial should be made known to the jury.

"You said on that occasion," continued Furnival, "that you were sure you had witnessed three signatures of Sir Joseph's that summer,—that you had probably witnessed three in July, that you were quite sure you had witnessed three in one week in July, that you were nearly sure you had witnessed three in one day, that you could not tell what day that might have been, and that you had been used as a witness so often that you really did not remember anything about it. Can you say whether that was the purport of the evidence you gave then?"

"If it's down there——" said John Kenneby, and then he stopped himself.

"It is down here; I have read it."

"I suppose it's all right," said Kenneby.

"I must trouble you to speak out," said the judge; "I cannot hear you, and it is impossible that the jury should do so." The judge's words were not uncivil, but his voice was harsh, and the only perceptible consequence of the remonstrance was to be seen in the

thick drops of perspiration standing on John Kenney's brow.

"That is the evidence which you gave on the former trial? May the jury presume that you then spoke the truth to the best of your knowledge?"

"I tried to speak the truth, Sir."

"You tried to speak the truth? But do you mean to say that you failed?"

"No, I don't think I failed."

"When, therefore, you told the jury that you were nearly sure that you had witnessed three signatures of Sir Joseph's in one day, that was truth?"

"I don't think I ever did."

"Ever did what?"

"Witness three papers in one day."

"You don't think you ever did?"

"I might have done, to be sure."

"But then, at that trial, about twelve months after the man's death, you were nearly sure you had done so."

"Was I?"

"So you told the jury."

"Then I did, Sir."

"Then you did what?"

"Did witness all those papers."

"You think then now that it is probable you witnessed three signatures on the same day?"

"No, I don't think that."

"Then what do you think?"

"It is so long ago, Sir, that I really don't know."

"Exactly. It is so long ago that you cannot depend on your memory."

"I suppose I can't, Sir."

"But you just now told the gentleman who

examined you on the other side, that you were quite sure you did not witness two deeds on the day he named,—the 14th of July. Now, seeing that you doubt your own memory, going back over so long a time, do you wish to correct that statement?"

"I suppose I do."

"What correction do you wish to make?"

"I don't think I did."

"Don't think you did what?"

"I don't think I signed two—"

"I really cannot hear the witness," said the judge.

"You must speak out louder," said Mr. Furnival, himself speaking very loudly.

"I mean to do it as well as I can," said Kenneby.

"I believe you do," said Furnival; "but in so meaning you must be very careful to state nothing as a certainty, of the certainty of which you are not sure. Are you certain that on that day you did not witness two deeds?"

"I think so."

"And yet you were not certain twenty years ago, when the fact was so much nearer to you?"

"I don't remember."

"You don't remember whether you were certain twelve months after the occurrence, but you think you are certain now."

"I mean, I don't think I signed two."

"It is then, only a matter of thinking?"

"No; only a matter of thinking."

"And you might have signed the two?"

"I certainly might have done so."

"What you mean to tell the jury is this: that you have no remembrance of signing twice on that special

day, although you know that you have acted as witness on behalf of Sir Joseph Mason more than twice on the same day?"

"Yes."

"That is the intended purport of your evidence?"

"Yes, Sir."

And then Mr. Furnival travelled off to that other point of Mr. Usbech's presence and alleged handwriting. On that matter Kenneby had not made any positive assertion, though he had expressed a very strong opinion. Mr. Furnival was not satisfied with this, but wished to show that Kenneby had not on that matter even a strong opinion. He again reverted to the evidence on the former trial, and read various questions with their answers: and the answers as given at that time certainly did not, when so taken, express a clear opinion on the part of the person who gave them; although an impartial person on reading the whole evidence would have found that a very clear opinion was expressed. When first asked, Kenneby had said that he was nearly sure that Mr. Usbech had not signed the document. But his very anxiety to be true had brought him into trouble. Mr. Furnival on that occasion had taken advantage of the word "nearly," and had at last succeeded in making him say that he was not sure at all. Evidence by means of torture,—thumbscrew and such like,—we have for many years past abandoned as barbarous, and have acknowledged that it is of its very nature useless in the search after truth. How long will it be before we shall recognise that the other kind of torture is equally opposed both to truth and civilisation?

"But Mr. Usbech was certainly in the room on that day?" continued Mr. Furnival.

"Yes, he was there."

"And knew what you were all doing, I suppose?"

"Yes, I suppose he knew."

"I presume it was he who explained to you the nature of the deed you were to witness?"

"I dare say he did."

"As he was the lawyer, that would be natural."

"I suppose it would."

"And you don't remember the nature of that special deed, as explained to you on the day when Bridget Bolster was in the room?"

"No, I don't."

"It might have been a will?"

"Yes, it might. I did sign one or two wills for Sir Joseph, I think."

"And as to this individual document, Mr. Usbech might have signed it in your presence, for anything you know to the contrary?"

"He might have done so."

"Now, on your oath, Kenneby, is your memory strong enough to enable you to give the jury any information on the subject upon which they may firmly rely in convicting that unfortunate lady of the terrible crime laid to her charge." Then for a moment Kenneby glanced round and fixed his eyes upon Lady Mason's face. "Think a moment before you answer; and deal with her as you would wish another should deal with you if you were so situated. Can you say that you remember that Usbech did not sign it?"

"Well, Sir, I don't think he did."

"But he might have done so?"

"Oh, yes; he might."

"You do not remember that he did do so?"

"Certainly not."

"And that is about the extent of what you mean to say?"

"Yes, Sir."

"Let me understand," said the judge—and then the perspiration became more visible on poor Kenneby's face;—"do you mean to say that you have no memory on the matter whatever?—that you simply do not remember whether Usbech did or did not sign it?"

"I don't think he signed it."

"But why do you think he did not, seeing that his name is there?"

"I didn't see him."

"Do you mean," continued the judge, "that you didn't see him, or that you don't remember that you saw him?"

"I don't remember that I saw him."

"But you may have done so? He may have signed, and you may have seen him do so, only you don't remember it?"

"Yes, my lord."

And then Kenneby was allowed to go down. As he did so, Joseph Mason, who sat near to him, turned upon him a look black as thunder. Mr. Mason gave him no credit for his timidity, but believed that he had been bought over by the other side. Dockwrath, however, knew better. "They did not quite beat him about his own signature," said he; "but I knew all along that we must depend chiefly upon Bolster."

Then Bridget Bolster was put into the box, and she was examined by Mr. Steelyard. She had heard Kenneby instructed to look up, and she therefore fixed her eyes upon the canopy over the judge's seat. There she fixed them, and there she kept them till her examination was over, merely turning them for a

moment on to Mr. Chaffanbrass, when that gentleman became particularly severe in his treatment of her. What she said in answer to Mr. Steelyard, was very simple. She had never witnessed but one signature in her life, and that she had done in Sir Joseph's room. The nature of the document had been explained to her. "But," as she said, "she was young and giddy then, and what went in at one ear went out at another." She didn't remember Mr. Usbech signing, but he might have done so. She thought he did not. As to the two signatures purporting to be hers, she could not say which was hers and which was not. But this she would swear positively, that they were not both hers. To this she adhered firmly, and Mr. Steelyard handed her over to Mr. Chaffanbrass.

Then Mr. Chaffanbrass rose from his seat, and every one knew that his work was cut out for him. Mr. Furnival had triumphed. It may be said that he had demolished his witness; but his triumph had been very easy. It was now necessary to demolish Bridget Bolster, and the opinion was general that if anybody could do it Mr. Chaffanbrass was the man. But there was a doggedness about Bridget Bolster which induced many to doubt whether even Chaffanbrass would be successful. Mr. Aram trusted greatly; but the bar would have preferred to stake their money on Bridget.

Chaffanbross as he rose pushed back his small ugly wig from his forehead, thrusting it rather on one side as he did so, and then, with his chin thrown forward, and a wicked, ill-meaning smile upon his mouth, he looked at Bridget for some moments before he spoke to her. She glanced at him, and instantly fixed her eyes back upon the canopy. She then folded her

hands one on the other upon the rail before her, compressed her lips and waited patiently.

"I think you say you're—a chambermaid?" That was the first question which Chaffanbrass asked, and Bridget Bolster gave a little start as she heard his sharp, angry, disagreeable voice.

"Yes, I am, Sir, at Palmer's Imperial Hotel, Plymouth, Devonshire; and have been for nineteen years, upper and under."

"Upper and under! What do upper and under mean?"

"When I was under, I had another above me; and now, as I'm upper, why there's others under me." So she explained her position at the hotel, but she never took her eyes from the canopy.

"You hadn't begun being—chambermaid, when you signed these documents?"

"I didn't sign only one of 'em."

"Well, one of them. You hadn't begun being chambermaid then?"

"No, I hadn't; I was housemaid at Orley Farm."

"Were you upper or under there?"

"Well, I believe I was both; that is, the cook was upper in the house."

"Oh, the cook was upper. Why wasn't she called to sign her name?"

"That I can't say. She was a very decent woman—that I can say—and her name was Martha M'Kens."

So far Mr. Chaffanbrass had not done much; but that was only the preliminary skirmish, as fencers play with their foils before they begin.

"And now, Bridget Bolster, if I understand you," he said, "you have sworn that on the 14th of July you only signed one of these documents."

"I only signed once, Sir. I didn't say nothing about the 14th of July, because I don't remember."

"But when you signed the one deed, you did not sign any other?"

"Neither then nor never."

"Do you know the offence for which that lady is being tried—Lady Mason."

"Well, I ain't sure; it's for doing something about the will."

"No, woman, it is not." And then, as Mr. Chaffanbrass raised his voice, and spoke with savage earnestness, Bridget again started, and gave a little leap up from the floor. But she soon settled herself back in her old position. "No one has dared to accuse her of that," continued Mr. Chaffanbrass, looking over at the lawyers on the other side. "The charge they have brought forward against her is that of perjury—of having given false evidence twenty years ago in a court of law. Now look here, Bridget Bolster; look at me, I say." She did look at him for a moment, and then turned her eyes back to the canopy. "As sure as you're a living woman, you shall be placed there and tried for the same offence,—for perjury,—if you tell me a falsehood respecting this matter."

"I won't say nothing but what's right," said Bridget.

"You had better not. Now look at these two signatures;" and he handed to her two deeds, or rather made one of the servants of the court hold them for him; "which of those signatures is the one which you did not sign?"

"I can't say, Sir."

"Did you write that further one,—that with your hand on it?"

"I can't say, Sir."

"Look at it, woman, before you answer me."

Bridget looked at it, and then repeated the same words—

"I can't say, Sir."

"And now look at the other." And she again looked down for a moment. "Did you write that?"

"I can't say, Sir."

"Will you swear that you wrote either?"

"I did write one once."

"Don't prevaricate with me, woman. Were either of those signatures there written by you?"

"I suppose that one was."

"Will you swear that you wrote either the one or the other?"

"I'll swear I did write one, once."

"Will you swear you wrote one of those you have before you? You can read, can't you?"

"Oh yes, I can read."

"Then look at them." Again she turned her eyes on them for half a moment. "Will you swear that you wrote either of those?"

"Not if there's another anywhere else," said Bridget, at last.

"Another anywhere else," said Chaffanbrass, repeating her words; "what do you mean by another?"

"If you've got another that anybody else has done, I won't say which of the three is mine. But I did one, and I didn't do no more."

Mr. Chaffanbrass continued at it for a long time, but with very indifferent success. That affair of the signatures, which was indeed the only point on which evidence was worth anything, he then abandoned, and tried to make her contradict herself about old Usbech. But on this subject she could say nothing. That

Usbech was present she remembered well, but as to his signing the deed, or not signing it, she would not pretend to say anything.

"I know he was cram full of gout," she said; "but I don't remember nothing more."

But it may be explained that Mr. Chaffanbrass had altogether altered his intention and the very plan of his campaign with reference to this witness, as soon as he saw what was her nature and disposition. He discovered very early in the affair that he could not force her to contradict herself and reduce her own evidence to nothing, as Furnival had done with the man. Nothing would flurry this woman, or force her to utter words of which she herself did not know the meaning. The more he might persevere in such an attempt, the more dogged and steady she would become. He therefore soon gave that up. He had already given it up when he threatened to accuse her of perjury, and resolved that as he could not shake her he would shake the confidence which the jury might place in her. He could not make a fool of her, and therefore he would make her out to be a rogue. Her evidence would stand alone, or nearly alone; and in this way he might turn her firmness to his own purpose, and explain that her dogged resolution to stick to one plain statement arose from her having been specially instructed so to do, with the object of ruining his client. For more than half an hour he persisted in asking her questions with this object; hinting that she was on friendly terms with Dockwrath; asking her what pay she had received for her evidence; making her acknowledge that she was being kept at free quarters, and on the fat of the land. He even produced from her a list of the good things

she had eaten that morning at breakfast, and at last succeeded in obtaining information as to that small but indiscreet glass of spirits. It was then, and then only, that poor Bridget became discomposed. Beef-steaks, sausages, and pigs' fry, though they were taken three times a day, were not disgraceful in her line of life; but that little thimbleful of brandy, taken after much pressing and in the openness of good fellowship, went sorely against the grain with her. "When one has to be badgered like this, one wants a drop of something more than ordinary," she said at last. And they were the only words which she did say which proved any triumph on the part of Mr. Chaffanbrass. But nevertheless Mr. Chaffanbrass was not dissatisfied. Triumph, immediate triumph over a poor maid-servant could hardly have been the object of a man who had been triumphant in such matters for the last thirty years. Would it not be practicable to make the jury doubt whether that woman could be believed? That was the triumph he desired. As for himself, Mr. Chaffanbrass knew well enough that she had spoken nothing but the truth. But he had so managed that the truth might be made to look like falsehood,—or at any rate to have a doubtful air. If he had done that, he had succeeded in the occupation of his life, and was indifferent to his own triumph.

CHAPTER XVIII

MR. FURNIVAL'S SPEECH

ALL this as may be supposed disturbed Felix Graham not a little. He perceived that each of those two witnesses had made a great effort to speak the truth;—an honest, painful effort to speak the truth, and in no way to go beyond it. His gall has risen within him while he had listened to Mr. Furnival, and witnessed his success in destroying the presence of mind of that weak wretch who was endeavouring to do his best in the cause of justice. And again, when Mr Chaffanbrass had seized hold of that poor dram, and used all his wit in deducing from it a self-condemnation from the woman before him;—when the practised barrister had striven to show that she was an habitual drunkard, dishonest, unchaste, evil in all her habits, Graham had felt almost tempted to get up and take her part. No doubt he had evinced this, for Chaffanbrass had understood what was going on in his colleague's mind, and had looked round at him from time to time with an air of scorn that had been almost unendurable.

And then it had become the duty of the prosecutors to prove the circumstances of the former trial. This was of course essentially necessary, seeing that the offence for which Lady Mason was now on her defence was perjury alleged to have been committed at that trial. And when this had been done at considerable length by Sir Richard Leatherham, not with-

out many interruptions from Mr. Furnival and much assistance from Mr. Steelyard,—it fell upon Felix Graham to show by cross-examination of Crook the attorney, what had been the nature and effect of Lady Mason's testimony. As he rose to do this, Mr. Chaf-fanbrass whispered into his ear, "If you feel yourself unequal to it I'll take it up. I won't have her thrown over for any etiquette,—nor yet for any squeamishness." To this Graham vouchsafed no answer. He would not even reply by a look, but he got up and did his work. At this point his conscience did not interfere with him, for the questions which he asked referred to facts which had really occurred. Lady Mason's testimony at that trial had been believed by everybody. The gentleman who had cross-examined her on the part of Joseph Mason, and who was now dead, had failed to shake her evidence. The judge who tried the case had declared to the jury that it was impossible to disbelieve her evidence. That judge was still living, a poor old bedridden man, and in the course of this latter trial his statement was given in evidence. There could be no doubt that at the time Lady Mason's testimony was taken as worthy of all credit. She had sworn that she had seen the three witnesses sign the codicil, and no one had then thrown discredit on her. The upshot of all was this, that the prosecuting side proved satisfactorily that such and such things had been sworn by Lady Mason; and Felix Graham on the side of the defence proved that, when she had so sworn, her word had been considered worthy of credence by the judge and by the jury, and had hardly been doubted even by the counsel opposed to her. All this really had been so, and Felix Graham used his utmost ingenuity in making clear to

the court how high and unassailed had been the position which his client then held.

All this occupied the court till nearly four o'clock, and then as the case was over on the part of the prosecution, the question arose whether or no Mr. Furnival should address the jury on that evening, or wait till the following day. "If your lordship will sit till seven o'clock," said Mr. Furnival, "I think I can undertake to finish what remarks I shall have to make by that time." "I should not mind sitting till nine for the pleasure of hearing Mr. Furnival," said the judge, who was very anxious to escape from Alston on the day but one following. And thus it was decided that Mr. Furnival should commence his speech.

I have said that in spite of some previous hesitation his old fire had returned to him when he began his work in court on behalf of his client. If this had been so when the work consisted in the cross-examination of a witness, it was much more so with him now when he had to exhibit his own powers of forensic eloquence. When a man knows that he can speak with ease and energy, and that he will be listened to with attentive ears, it is all but impossible that he should fail to be enthusiastic, even though his cause be a bad one. It was so with him now. All his old fire came back upon him, and before he had done he had almost brought himself again to believe Lady Mason to be that victim of persecution as which he did not hesitate to represent her to the jury.

"Gentlemen of the jury," he said, "I never rose to plead a client's cause with more confidence than I now feel in pleading that of my friend Lady Mason. Twenty years ago I was engaged in defending her rights in this

matter, and I then succeeded. I little thought at that time that I should be called on after so long an interval to renew my work. I little thought that the pertinacity of her opponent would hold out for such a period. I compliment him on the firmness of his character, on that equable temperament which has enabled him to sit through all this trial, and to look without dismay on the unfortunate lady whom he has considered it to be his duty to accuse of perjury. I did not think that I should live to fight this battle again. But so it is; and as I had but little doubt of victory then,—so have I none now. Gentlemen of the jury, I must occupy some of your time and of the time of the court in going through the evidence which has been adduced by my learned friend against my client; but I almost feel that I shall be detaining you unnecessarily, so sure am I that the circumstances, as they have been already explained to you, could not justify you in giving a verdict against her."

As Mr. Furnival's speech occupied fully three hours, I will not trouble my readers with the whole of it. He began by describing the former trial, and giving his own recollections as to Lady Mason's conduct on that occasion. In doing this, he fully acknowledged on her behalf that she did give as evidence that special statement which her opponents now endeavoured to prove to have been false. "If it were the case," he said, "that that codicil—or that pretended codicil, was not executed by old Sir Joseph Mason, and was not witnessed by Usbech, Kenneby, and Bridget Bolster,—then, in that case, Lady Mason has been guilty of perjury." Mr. Furnival, as he made this acknowledgment, studiously avoided the face of Lady Mason. But as he made this assertion, almost everybody in the court except her own counsel did look at her. Joseph Mason

opposite and Dockwrath fixed their gaze closely upon her. Sir Richard Leatherham and Mr. Steelyard turned their eyes towards her, probably without meaning to do so. The judge looked over his spectacles at her. Even Mr. Aram glanced round at her surreptitiously; and Lucius turned his face upon his mother's almost with an air of triumph. But she bore it all without flinching;—bore it all without flinching, though the state of her mind at that moment must have been pitiable. And Mrs. Orme, who held her hand all the while, knew that it was so. The hand which rested in hers was twitched as it were convulsively, but the culprit gave no outward sign of her guilt.

Mr. Furnival then read much of the evidence given at the former trial, and especially showed how the witnesses had then failed to prove that Usbech had not been required to write his name. It was quite true, he said, that they had been equally unable to prove that he had done so; but that amounted to nothing; the "onus probandi" lay with the accusing side. There was the signature, and it was for them to prove that it was not that which it pretended to be. Lady Mason had proved that it was so; and because that it had then been held to be sufficient, they now, after twenty years, took this means of invalidating her testimony. From that he went to the evidence given at the present trial, beginning with the malice and interested motives of Dockwrath. Against three of them only it was needful that he should allege anything, seeing that the statements made by others were in no way injurious to Lady Mason,—if the statements made by those three were not credible. Torrington, for instance, had proved that other deed; but what of that, if on the fatal 14th of July Sir Joseph Mason had executed two deeds? As to

Dockwrath,—that his conduct had been interested and malicious there could be no doubt; and he submitted to the jury that he had shown himself to be a man unworthy of credit. As to Kenneby,—that poor weak creature, as Mr. Furnival in his mercy called him,—he, Mr. Furnival, could not charge his conscience with saying that he believed him to have been guilty of any falsehood. On the contrary, he conceived that Kenneby had endeavoured to tell the truth. But he was one of those men whose minds were so inconsequential that they literally did not know truth from falsehood. He had not intended to lie when he told the jury that he was not quite sure he had never witnessed two signatures by Sir Joseph Mason on the same day, nor did he lie when he told them again that he had witnessed three. He had meant to declare the truth; but he was unfortunately, a man whose evidence could not be of much service in any case of importance, and could be of no service whatever in a criminal charge tried, as was done in this instance, more than twenty years after the alleged commission of the offence. With regard to Bridget Bolster, he had no hesitation whatever in telling the jury that she was a woman unworthy of belief,—unworthy of that credit which the jury must place in her before they could convict any one on her unaided testimony. It must have been clear to them all that she had come into court drilled and instructed to make one point-blank statement, and to stick to that. She had refused to give any evidence as to her own signature. She would not even look at her own name as written by herself; but had contented herself with repeating over and over again those few words which she had been instructed so to say;—the statement namely, that she had never put her hand to more than one deed.

Then he addressed himself, as he concluded his speech, to that part of the subject which was more closely personal to Lady Mason herself. "And now, gentlemen of the jury," he said, "before I can dismiss you from your weary day's work, I must ask you to regard the position of the lady who has been thus accused, and the amount of probability of her guilt which you may assume from the nature of her life. I shall call no witnesses as to her character, for I will not submit her friends to the annoyance of those questions which the gentlemen opposite might feel it their duty to put to them. Circumstances have occurred—so much I will tell you, and so much no doubt you all personally know, though it is not in evidence before you;—circumstances have occurred which would make it cruel on my part to place her old friend Sir Peregrine Orme in that box. The story, could I tell it to you, is one full of romance, but full also of truth and affection. But though Sir Peregrine Orme is not here, there sits his daughter by Lady Mason's side,—there she has sat through this tedious trial, giving comfort to the woman that she loves,—and there she will sit till your verdict shall have made her further presence here unnecessary. His lordship and my learned friend there will tell you that you cannot take that as evidence of character. They will be justified in so telling you; but I, on the other hand, defy you not to take it as such evidence. Let us make what laws we will, they cannot take precedence of human nature. There too sits my client's son. You will remember that at the beginning of this trial the solicitor-general expressed a wish that he were not here. I do not know whether you then responded to that wish, but I believe I may take it for granted that you do not do so now. Had any woman dear to

either of you been so placed through the malice of an enemy, would you have hesitated to sit by her in her hour of trial? Had you doubted of her innocence you might have hesitated; for who could endure to hear announced in a crowded court like this the guilt of a mother or a wife? But he has no doubt. Nor, I believe, has any living being in this court,—unless it be her kinsman opposite, whose life for the last twenty years has been made wretched by a wicked longing after the patrimony of his brother.

“ Gentlemen of the jury, there sits my client with as loving a friend on one side as ever woman had, and with her only child on the other. During the incidents of this trial the nature of the life she had led during the last twenty years,—since the period of that terrible crime with which she is charged,—has been proved before you. I may fearlessly ask you whether so fair a life is compatible with the idea of guilt so foul? I have known her intimately during all those years,—not as a lawyer, but as a friend,—and I confess that the audacity of this man Dockwrath, in assailing such a character, with such an accusation, strikes me almost with admiration. What! Forgery!—for that, gentlemen of the jury, is the crime with which she is substantially charged. Look at her, as she sits there! That she, at the age of twenty, or not much more,—she who had so well performed the duties of her young life, that she should have forged a will,—have traced one signature after another in such a manner as to have deceived all those lawyers who were on her track immediately after her husband’s death! For, mark you, if this be true, with her own hand she must have done it! There was no accomplice there. Look at her! Was she a forger? Was she a woman to deceive the sharp

bloodhounds of the law? Could she, with that young baby on her bosom, have wrested from such as him"—and as he spoke he pointed with his finger, but with a look of unutterable scorn, to Joseph Mason, who was sitting opposite to him—"that fragment of his old father's property which he coveted so sorely? Where had she learned such skilled artifice? Gentlemen, such ingenuity in crime as that has never yet been proved in a court of law, even against those who have spent a life of wretchedness in acquiring such skill; and now you are asked to believe that such a deed was done by a young wife, of whom all that you know is that her conduct in every other respect had been beyond all praise! Gentlemen, I might have defied you to believe this accusation had it even been supported by testimony of a high character. Even in such case you would have felt that there was more behind than had been brought to your knowledge. But now, having seen, as you have, of what nature are the witnesses on whose testimony she has been impeached, it is impossible that you should believe this story. Had Lady Mason been a woman steeped in guilt from her infancy, had she been noted for cunning and fraudulent ingenuity, had she been known as an expert forger, you would not have convicted her on this indictment, having had before you the malice and greed of Dockwrath, the stupidity—I may call it idiocy, of Kenneby, and the dogged resolution to conceal the truth evinced by the woman Bolster. With strong evidence you could not have believed such a charge against so excellent a lady. With such evidence as you have had before you, you could not have believed the charge against a previously convicted felon.

"And what has been the object of this terrible per-

secution,—of the dreadful punishment which has been inflicted on this poor lady? For remember, though you cannot pronounce her guilty, her sufferings have been terribly severe. Think what it must have been for a woman with habits such as hers, to have looked forward for long, long weeks to such a martyrdom as this! Think what she must have suffered in being dragged here and subjected to the gaze of all the county as a suspected felon! Think what must have been her feelings when I told her, not knowing how deep an ingenuity might be practised against her, that I must counsel her to call to her aid the unequalled talents of my friend Mr. Chaffanbrass"—"Unequalled no longer, but far surpassed," whispered Chaffanbrass, in a voice that was audible through all the centre of the court. "Her punishment has been terrible," continued Mr. Furnival. "After what she has gone through, it may well be doubted whether she can continue to reside at that sweet spot which has aroused such a feeling of avarice in the bosom of her kinsman. You have heard that Sir Joseph Mason had promised his eldest son that Orley Farm should form a part of his inheritance. It may be that the old man did make such a promise. If so, he thought fit to break it. But is it not wonderful that a man wealthy as is Mr. Mason—for his fortune is large; who has never wanted anything that money can buy; a man for whom his father did so much,—that he should be stirred up by disappointed avarice to carry in his bosom for twenty years so bitter a feeling of rancour against those who are nearest to him by blood and ties of family! Gentlemen, it has been a fearful lesson; but it is one which neither you nor I will ever forget.

"And now I shall leave my client's case in your

hands. As to the verdict which you will give, I have no apprehension. You know as well as I do that she has not been guilty of this terrible crime. That you will so pronounce I do not for a moment doubt. But I do hope that that verdict will be accompanied by some expression on your part which may show to the world at large how great has been the wickedness displayed in the accusation."

And yet as he sat down he knew that she had been guilty! To his ear her guilt had never been confessed; but yet he knew that it was so, and, knowing that, he had been able to speak as though her innocence were a thing of course. That those witnesses had spoken truth he also knew, and yet he had been able to hold them up to the execration of all around them as though they had committed the worst of crimes from the foulest of motives! And more than this, stranger than this, worse than this—when the legal world knew—as the legal world soon did know—that all this had been so, the legal world found no fault with Mr. Furnival, conceiving that he had done his duty by his client in a manner becoming an English barrister and an English gentleman.

CHAPTER XIX

MRS. ORME TELLS THE STORY

It was late when that second day's work was over, and when Mrs. Orme and Lady Mason again found themselves in the Hamworth carriage. They had sat in court from ten in the morning till past seven, with a short interval of a few minutes in the middle of the day, and were weary to the very soul when they left it. Lucius again led out his mother, and as he did so he expressed to her in strong language his approval of Mr. Furnival's speech. At last some one had spoken out on his mother's behalf in that tone which should have been used from the first. He had been very angry with Mr. Furnival, thinking that the barrister had lost sight of his mother's honour, and that he was playing with her happiness. But now he was inclined to forgive him. Now at last the truth had been spoken in eloquent words, and the persecutors of his mother had been addressed in language such as it was fitting that they should hear. To him the last two hours had been two hours of triumph, and as he passed through the hall of the court he whispered in his mother's ear that now, at last, as he hoped, her troubles were at an end.

And another whisper had been spoken as they passed through that hall. Mrs. Orme went out leaning on the arm of her son, but on the other side of her was Mr. Aram. He had remained in his seat till they had begun to move, and then he followed them. Mrs. Orme was

already half way across the court when he made his way up to her side and very gently touched her arm.

"Sir?" said she, looking round.

"Do not let her be too sure," he said. "Do not let her be over-confident. All that may go for nothing with a jury." Then he lifted his hat and left her.

All that go for nothing with a jury! She hardly understood this, but yet she felt that it all should go for nothing if right were done. Her mind was not argumentative, nor yet perhaps was her sense of true justice very acute. When Sir Peregrine had once hinted that it would be well that the criminal should be pronounced guilty, because in truth she had been guilty, Mrs. Orme by no means agreed with him. But now, having heard how those wretched witnesses had been denounced, knowing how true had been the words they had spoken, knowing how false were those assurances of innocence with which Mr. Furnival had been so fluent, she felt something of that spirit which had actuated Sir Peregrine, and had almost thought that justice demanded a verdict against her friend.

"Do not let her be over-confident," Mr. Aram had said. But in truth Mrs. Orme, as she had listened to Mr. Furnival's speech, had become almost confident that Lady Mason would be acquitted. It had seemed to her impossible that any jury should pronounce her to be guilty after that speech. The state of her mind as she listened to it had been very painful. Lady Mason's hand had rested in her own during a great portion of it; and it would have been natural that she should give some encouragement to her companion by a touch, by a slight pressure, as the warm words of praise fell from the lawyer's mouth. But how could she do so, knowing that the praise was false? It was not possible to her

to show her friendship by congratulating her friend on the success of a lie. Lady Mason also had, no doubt, felt this, for after a while her hand had been withdrawn, and they had both listened in silence, giving no signs to each other as to their feelings on the subject.

But as they sat together in the carriage Lucius did give vent to his feelings. "I cannot understand why all that should not have been said before, and said in a manner to have been as convincing as it was to-day."

"I suppose there was no opportunity before the trial," said Mrs. Orme, feeling that she must say something, but feeling also how impossible it was to speak on the subject with any truth in the presence both of Lady Mason and her son.

"But an occasion should have been made," said Lucius. "It is monstrous that my mother should have been subjected to this accusation for months and that no one till now should have spoken out to show how impossible it is that she should have been guilty."

"Ah! Lucius, you do not understand," said his mother.

"And I hope I never may," said he. "Why did not the jury get up in their seats at once and pronounce their verdict when Mr. Furnival's speech was over?"

Why should they wait there, giving another day of prolonged trouble knowing as they must do what their verdict will be? To me all this is incomprehensible, seeing that no good can in any way come from it."

And so he went on, striving to urge his companions to speak upon a subject which to them did not admit of speech in his presence. It was very painful to them, for in addressing Mrs. Orme he almost demanded from her some expression of triumph. "You at least have

believed in her innocence," he said at last, "and have not been ashamed to show that you did so."

"Lucius," said his mother, "we are very weary; do not speak to us now. Let us rest till we are at home." Then they closed their eyes and there was silence till the carriage drove up to the door of Orley Farm House.

The two ladies immediately went up stairs, but Lucius, with more cheerfulness about him than he had shown for months past, remained below to give orders for their supper. It had been a joy to him to hear Joseph Mason and Dockwrath exposed, and to listen to those words which had so clearly told the truth as to his mother's history. All that torrent of indignant eloquence had been to him an enumeration of the simple facts,—of the facts as he knew them to be,—of the facts as they would now be made plain to all the world. At last the day had come when the cloud would be blown away. He, looking down from the height of his superior intellect on the folly of those below him, had been indignant at the great delay:—but that he would now forgive.

They had not been long in the house, perhaps about fifteen minutes, when Mrs. Orme returned down stairs and gently entered the dining-room. He was still there, standing with his back to the fire and thinking over the work of the day.

"Your mother will not come down this evening, Mr. Mason."

"Not come down?"

"No; she is very,—very tired indeed. I fear you hardly know how much she has gone through."

"Shall I go to her?" said Lucius.

"No, Mr. Mason, do not do that. I will return to

her now. And—but;—in a few minutes, Mr. Mason, I will come back to you again, for I shall have something to say to you."

" You will have tea here?"

" I don't know. I think not. When I have spoken to you I will go back to your mother. I came down now in order that you might not wait for us." And then she left the room and again went up stairs. It annoyed him that his mother should thus keep away from him, but still he did not think that there was any special reason for it. Mrs. Orme's manner had been strange; but then everything around them in these days was strange, and it did not occur to him that Mrs. Orme would have aught to say in her promised interview which would bring to him any new cause for sorrow.

Lady Mason, when Mrs. Orme returned to her, was sitting exactly in the position in which she had been left. Her bonnet was off and was lying by her side, and she was seated in a large arm-chair, again holding both her hands to the sides of her head. No attempt had been made to smooth her hair or to remove the dust and soil which had come from the day's long sitting in the court. She was a woman very careful in her toilet and scrupulously nice in all that touched her person. But now all that had been neglected, and her whole appearance was haggard and dishevelled.

" You have not told him?" she said.

" No; I have not told him yet; but I have bidden him expect me. He knows that I am coming to him."

" And how did he look?"

" I did not see his face." And then there was silence between them for a few minutes, during which Mrs. Orme stood at the back of Lady Mason's chair with her

hand on Lady Mason's shoulder. "Shall I go now, dear?" said Mrs. Orme.

"No; stay a moment; not yet. Oh, Mrs. Orme!"

"You will find that you will be stronger and better able to bear it when it has been done."

"Stronger! Why should I wish to be stronger? How will he bear it?"

"It will be a blow to him, of course."

"It will strike him to the ground, Mrs. Orme. I shall have murdered him. I do not think that he will live when he knows that he is so disgraced."

"He is a man, and will bear it as a man should do. Shall I do anything for you before I go?"

"Stay a moment. Why must it be to-night?"

"He must not be in the court to-morrow. And what difference will one day make? He must know it when the property is given up."

Then there was a knock at the door, and a girl entered with a decanter, two wine-glasses, and a slice or two of bread and butter. "You must drink that," said Mrs. Orme, pouring out a glass of wine.

"And you?"

"Yes, I will take some too. There. I shall be stronger now. Nay, Lady Mason, you shall drink it. And now if you will take my advice you will go to bed."

"You will come to me again?"

"Yes; directly it is over. Of course I shall come to you. Am I not to stay here all night?"

"But him;—I will not see him. He is not to come."

"That will be as he pleases."

"No. You promised that. I cannot see him when he knows what I have done for him."

"Not to hear him say that he forgives you?"

"He will not forgive me. You do not know him. Could you bear to look at your boy if you had disgraced him for ever?"

"Whatever I might have done he would not desert me. Nor will Lucius desert you. Shall I go now?"

"Ah, me! Would that I were in my grave!"

Then Mrs. Orme bent over her and kissed her, pressed both her hands, then kissed her again, and silently creeping out of the room made her way once more slowly down the stairs.

Mrs. Orme, as will have been seen, was sufficiently anxious to perform the task which she had given herself, but yet her heart sank within her as she descended to the parlour. It was indeed a terrible commission, and her readiness to undertake it had come not from any feeling on her own part that she was fit for the work and could do it without difficulty, but from the eagerness with which she had persuaded Lady Mason that the thing must be done by some one. And now who else could do it? In Sir Peregrine's present state it would have been a cruelty to ask him; and then his feelings towards Lucius in the matter were not tender as were those of Mrs. Orme. She had been obliged to promise that she herself would do it, or otherwise she could not have urged the doing. And now the time had come. Immediately on their return to the house Mrs. Orme had declared that the story should be told at once; and then Lady Mason, sinking into the chair from which she had not since risen, had at length agreed that it should be so. The time had now come and Mrs. Orme, whose footsteps down the stairs had not been audible, stood for a moment with the handle of the door in her hand.

Had it been possible she also would now have put it

off till the morrow,—would have put it off till any other time than that which was then present. All manner of thoughts crowded on her during those few seconds. In what way should she do it? What words should she use? How should she begin? She was to tell this young man that his mother had committed a crime of the very blackest dye, and now she felt that she should have prepared herself and resolved in what fashion this should be done. Might it not be well, she asked herself for one moment, that she should take the night to think of it and then see him in the morning? The idea, however, only lasted her for a moment, and then, fearing lest she might allow herself to be seduced into some weakness, she turned the handle and entered the room.

He was still standing with his back to the fire, leaning against the mantelpiece, and thinking over the occurrences of the day that was past. His strongest feeling now was one of hatred to Joseph Mason,—of hatred mixed with thorough contempt. What must men say of him after such a struggle on his part to ruin the fame of a lady and to steal the patrimony of a brother! “Is she still determined not to come down?” he said as soon as he saw Mrs. Orme.

“No; she will not come down to-night, Mr. Mason. I have something that I must tell you.”

“What! is she ill? Has it been too much for her?”

“Mr. Mason,” she said, “I hardly know how to do what I have undertaken.” And he could see that she actually trembled as she spoke to him.

“What is it, Mrs. Orme? Is it anything about the property? I think you need hardly be afraid of me. I believe I may say I could bear anything of that kind.”

“Mr. Mason——” And then again she stopped herself. How was she to speak this horrible word?

"Is it anything about the trial?" He was now beginning to be frightened, feeling that something terrible was coming; but still of the absolute truth he had no suspicion.

"Oh! Mr. Mason, if it were possible that I could spare you I would do so. If there were any escape,—any way in which it might be avoided."

"What is it?" said he. And now his voice was hoarse and low, for a feeling of fear had come upon him. "I am a man and can bear it, whatever it is."

"You must be a man then, for it is very terrible. Mr. Mason, that will, you know——"

"You mean the codicil?"

"The will that gave you the property——"

"Yes,"

"It was not done by your father."

"Who says so?"

"It is too sure. It was not done by him,—nor by them,—those other people who were in the court to-day."

"But who says so? How is it known? If my father did not sign it, it is a forgery; and who forged it? Those wretches have bought over some one and you have been deceived, Mrs. Orme. It is not of the property I am thinking, but of my mother. If it were as you say, my mother must have known it?"

"Ah! yes."

"And you mean that she did know it; that she knew it was a forgery?"

"Oh! Mr. Mason."

"Heaven and earth! Let me go to her. If she were to tell me so herself I would not believe it of her. Ah! she has told you?"

"Yes; she has told me."

"Then she is mad. This has been too much for her, and her brain has gone with it. Let me go to her, Mrs. Orme."

"No, no; you must not go to her." And Mrs. Orme put herself directly before the door. "She is not mad,—not now. Then, at that time, we must think she was so. It is not so now."

"I cannot understand you." And he put his left hand up to his forehead as though to steady his thoughts. "I do not understand you. If the will be a forgery, who did it?"

This question she could not answer at the moment. She was still standing against the door, and her eyes fell to the ground. "Who did it?" he repeated. "Whose hand wrote my father's name?"

"You must be merciful, Mr. Mason."

"Merciful;—to whom?"

"To your mother."

"Merciful to my mother! Mrs. Orme, speak out to me. If the will was forged, who forged it? You cannot mean to tell me that she did it!"

She did not answer him at the moment in words, but coming close up to him she took both his hands in hers, and then looked steadfastly up into his eyes. His face had now become almost convulsed with emotion, and his brow was very black. "Do you wish me to believe that my mother forged the will herself?" Then again he paused, but she said nothing. "Woman, it's a lie," he exclaimed; and then tearing his hands from her, shaking her off, and striding away with quick footsteps, he threw himself on a sofa that stood in the furthest part of the room.

She paused for a moment and then followed him very gently. She followed him and stood over him in silence

for a moment, as he lay with his face from her. "Mr. Mason," she said at last, "you told me that you would bear this like a man."

But he made her no answer, and she went on. "Mr. Mason, it is as I tell you. Years and years ago, when you were a baby, and when she thought that your father was unjust to you—for your sake,—to remedy that injustice, she did this thing."

"What; forged his name! It must be a lie. Though an angel came to tell me so, it would be a lie! What; my mother!" And now he turned round and faced her, still however, lying on the sofa.

"It is true, Mr. Mason. Oh, how I wish that it were not! But you must forgive her. It is years ago, and she has repented of it. Sir Peregrine has forgiven her, —and I have done so."

And then she told him the whole story. She told him why the marriage had been broken off, and described to him the manner in which the truth had been made known to Sir Peregrine. It need hardly be said, that in doing so, she dealt as softly as was possible with his mother's name; but yet she told him everything. "She wrote it herself, in the night."

"What all; all the names herself?"

"Yes, all."

"Mrs. Orme it cannot be so. I will not believe it. To me it is impossible. That you believe it I do not doubt, but I cannot. Let me go to her. I will go to her myself. But even should she say so herself, I will not believe it."

But she would not let him go up stairs even though he attempted to move her from the door, almost with violence. "No; not till you say that you will forgive her and be gentle with her. And it must not be to-night.

We will be up early in the morning, and you can see her before we go;—if you will be gentle to her."

He still persisted that he did not believe the story, but it became clear to her, by degrees, that the meaning of it all had at last sunk into his mind, and that he did believe it. Over and over again she told him all that she knew, explaining to him what his mother had suffered, making him perceive why she had removed herself out of his hands, and had leant on others for advice. And she told him also that though they still hoped that the jury might acquit her, the property must be abandoned.

"I will leave the house this night if you wish it," he said.

"When it is all over, when she has been acquitted and shall have gone away, then let it be done. Mr. Mason, you will go with her; will you not?" and then again there was a pause.

"Mrs. Orme, it is impossible that I should say now what I may do. It seems to me as though I could not live through it. I do not believe it. I cannot believe it."

As soon as she had exacted a promise from him that he would not go to his mother, at any rate without further notice, she herself went up stairs and found Lady Mason lying on her bed. At first Mrs. Orme thought that she was asleep, but no such comfort had come to the poor woman. "Does he know it?" she asked.

Mrs. Orme's task for that night was by no means yet done. After remaining for a while with Lady Mason she again returned to Lucius, and was in this way a bearer of messages between them. There was at last no question as to doubting the story. He did believe it. He could not avoid the necessity for such belief. "Yes," he said, when Mrs. Orme spoke again

of his leaving the place, "I will go and hide myself; and as for her——"

"But you will go with her,—if the jury do not say that she was guilty——"

"Oh, Mrs. Orme!"

"If they do, you will come back for her, when the time of her punishment is over? She is still your mother, Mr. Mason."

At last the work of the night was done, and the two ladies went to their beds. The understanding was that Lucius should see his mother before they started in the morning, but that he should not again accompany them to the court. Mrs. Orme's great object had been,—her great object as regarded the present moment,—to prevent his presence in court when the verdict should be given. In this she had succeeded. She could now wish for an acquittal with a clear conscience; and could as it were absolve the sinner within her own heart, seeing that there was no longer any doubt as to the giving up of the property. Whatever might be the verdict of the jury Joseph Mason of Groby would, without doubt, obtain the property which belonged to him.

"Good-night, Mr. Mason," Mrs. Orme said at last, as she gave him her hand.

"Good-night. I believe that in my madness I spoke to you to-night like a brute."

"No. It was nothing. I did not think of it."

"When you think of how it was with me, you will forgive me."

She pressed his hand and again told him that she had not thought of it. It was nothing. And indeed it had been as nothing to her. There may be moments in a man's life when any words may be forgiven, even though they be spoken to a woman.

When Mrs. Orme was gone, he stood for a while perfectly motionless in the dining-room, and then coming out into the hall he opened the front door, and taking his hat, went out into the night. It was still winter, but the night, though cold and very dark, was fine, and the air was sharp with the beginning frost. Leaving the door open he walked forth and passing out on to the road went down from thence to the gate. It had been his constant practice to walk up and down from his own hall door to his own gate on the high road, perhaps comforting himself too warmly with the reflection that the ground on which he walked was all his own. He had no such comfort now, as he made his way down the accustomed path and leaned upon the gate, thinking over what he had heard.

A forger! At some such hour as this, with patient premeditated care, she had gone to work and committed one of the vilest crimes known to man. And this was his mother! And he, he, Lucius Mason, had been living for years on the fruit of this villainy;—had been so living till this terrible day of retribution had come upon him! I fear that at that moment he thought more of his own misery than he did of hers, and hardly considered, as he surely should have done, that mother's love which had led to all this guilt. And for a moment he resolved that he would not go back to the house. His head, he said to himself, should never again rest under a roof which belonged of right to Joseph Mason.

He had injured Joseph Mason;—had injured him innocently, indeed, as far as he himself was concerned; but he had injured him greatly, and therefore now hated him all the more. "He shall have it instantly," he said, and walked forth into the high road as though he would

not allow his feet to rest again on his brother's property.

But he was forced to remember that this could not be so. His mother's trial was not yet over, and even in the midst of his own personal trouble he remembered that the verdict to her was still a matter of terrible import. He would not let it be known that he had abandoned the property, at any rate till that verdict had been given. And then as he moved back to the house he tried to think in what way it would become him to behave to his mother. "She can never be my mother again," he said to himself. They were terrible words; —but then was not his position very terrible.

And when at last he had bolted the front door, going through the accustomed task mechanically, and had gone up stairs to his own room, he had failed to make up his mind on this subject. Perhaps it would be better that he should not see her. What could he say to her? What word of comfort could he speak? It was not only that she had beggared him! Nay; it was not that at all! But she had doomed him to a life of disgrace which no effort of his own could wipe away. And then as he threw himself on his bed he thought of Sophia Furnival. Would she share his disgrace with him? Was it possible that there might be solace there?

Quite impossible, we should say, who know her well.

CHAPTER XX

YOUNG LOCHINVAR

JUDGE STAVELEY, whose court had not been kept sitting to a late hour by any such eloquence as that of Mr. Furnival, had gone home before the business of the other court had closed. Augustus, who was his father's marshal, remained for his friend, and had made his way in among the crowd, so as to hear the end of the speech.

"Don't wait dinner for us," he had said to his father. "If you do you will be hating us all the time; and we sha'n't be there till between eight and nine."

"I should be sorry to hate you," said the judge, "and so I wont." When therefore Felix Graham escaped from the court at about half-past seven, the two young men were able to take their own time and eat their dinner together comfortably, enjoying their bottle of champagne between them perhaps more thoroughly than they would have done had the judge and Mrs. Staveley shared it with them.

But Felix had something of which to think besides the champagne—something which was of more consequence to him even than the trial in which he was engaged. Madeline had promised that she would meet him that evening;—or rather had not so promised. When asked to do so she had not refused, but even while not refusing had reminded him that her mother would be there. Her manner to him had, he thought, been cold, though she had not been ungracious. Upon

the whole, he could not make up his mind to expect success. "Then he must have been a fool!" the reader learned in such matters will say. The reader learned in such matters is, I think, right. In that respect he was a fool.

"I suppose we must give the governor the benefit of our company over his wine," said Augustus, as soon as their dinner was over.

"I suppose we ought to do so."

"And why not? Is there any objection?"

"To tell the truth," said Graham, "I have an appointment which I am very anxious to keep."

"An appointment? Where? Here at Noningsby, do you mean?"

"In this house. But yet I cannot say that it is absolutely an appointment. I am going to ask your sister what my fate is to be."

"And that is the appointment! Very well, my dear fellow; and may God prosper you. If you can convince the governor that it is all right, I shall make no objection. I wish, for Madeline's sake, that you had not such a terrible bee in your bonnet."

"And you will go to the judge alone?"

"Oh, yes. I'll tell him—— What shall I tell him?"

"The truth, if you will. Good-bye, old fellow. You will not see me again to-night, nor yet to-morrow in this house, unless I am more fortunate than I have any right to hope to be."

"Faint heart never won fair lady, you know," said Augustus.

"My heart is faint enough then; but nevertheless I shall say what I have got to say." And then he got up from the table.

"If you don't come down to us," said Augustus, "I shall come up to you. But may God speed you. And now I'll go to the governor."

Felix made his way from the small breakfast-parlour in which they had dined across the hall into the drawing-room, and there he found Lady Staveley alone. "So the trial is not over yet, Mr. Graham?" she said.

"No; there will be another day of it."

"And what will be the verdict? Is it possible that she really forged the will?"

"Ah! that I cannot say. You know that I am one of her counsel, Lady Staveley?"

"Yes; I should have remembered that, and been more discreet. If you are looking for Madeline, Mr. Graham, I think that she is in the library."

"Oh! thank you;—in the library." And then Felix got himself out of the drawing-room into the hall again not in the most graceful manner. He might have gone direct from the drawing-room to the library, but this he did not remember. It was very odd, he thought, that Lady Staveley, of whose dislike to him he had felt sure, should have thus sent him direct to her daughter, and have become a party, as it were, to an appointment between them. But he had not much time to think of this before he found himself in the room. There, sure enough, was Madeline waiting to listen to his story. She was seated when he entered, with her back to him; but as she heard him she rose, and, after pausing for a moment, she stepped forward to meet him.

"You and Augustus were very late to-day," she said.

"Yes. I was kept there, and he was good enough to wait for me."

"You said you wanted to—speak to me," she said,

hesitating a little, but yet very little; "to speak to me alone; and so mamma said I had better come in here. I hope you are not vexed that I should have told her."

"Certain'y not, Miss Staveley."

"Because I have no secrets from mamma."

"Nor do I wish that anything shou'd be secret. I hate all seccries. Miss Staveley, your father knows of my intention."

On this point Madeline did not feel it to be necessary to say anything. Of course her father knew of the intention. Had she not received her father's sanction for listening to Mr. Graham she would not have been alone with him in the library. It might be that the time would come in which she would explain all this to her lover, but that time had not come yet. So when he spoke of her father she remained silent, and allowing her eyes to fall to the ground she stood before him, waiting to hear his question.

"Miss Staveley," he said;—and he was conscious himself of being very awkward. Much more so, indeed, than there was any need, for Madeline was not aware that he was awkward. In her eyes he was quite master of the occasion, and seemed to have everything his own way. He had already done all that was difficult in the matter, and had done it without any awkwardness. He had already made himself master of her heart, and it was only necessary now that he should enter in and take possession. The ripe fruit had fallen, as Miss Furnival had once chosen to express it, and there he was to pick it up,—if only he considered it worth his trouble to do so. That manner of the picking would not signify much, as Madeline thought. That he desired to take it into his garner and preserve it for his life's use was everything to her,

but the method of his words at the present moment was not much. He was her lord and master. He was the one man who had conquered and taken possession of her spirit; and as to his being awkward, there was not much in that. Nor do I say that he was awkward. He spoke his mind in honest, plain terms, and I do not know that he could have done better.

"Miss Staveley," he said, "in asking you to see me alone, I have made a great venture. I am indeed risking all that I most value." And then he paused, as though he expected that she would speak. But she still kept her eyes upon the ground, and still stood silent before him. "I cannot but think you must guess my purpose," he said, "though I acknowledge that I have had nothing that can warrant me in hoping for a favourable answer. There is my hand; if you can take it you need not doubt that you have my heart with it." And then he held out to her his broad right hand.

Madeline still stood silent before him and still fixed her eyes upon the ground, but very slowly she raised her little hand and allowed her soft slight fingers to rest upon his open palm. It was as though she thus affixed her legal signature and seal to the deed of gift. She had not said a word to him; not a word of love or a word of assent; but no such word was now necessary.

"Madeline, my own Madeline," he said; and then taking unfair advantage of the fingers which she had given him he drew her to his breast and folded her in his arms.

It was nearly an hour after this when he returned to the drawing-room "Do go in now," she said. "You must not wait any longer, indeed you must go."

"And you——; you will come in presently."

"It is already nearly eleven. No, I will not show myself again to-night. Mamma will soon come up to me, I know. Good-night, Felix. Do you go now, and I will follow you." And then after some further little ceremony he left her.

When he entered the drawing-room Lady Staveley was there, and the judge with his teacup beside him, and Augustus standing with his back to the fire. Felix walked up to the circle, and taking a chair sat down, but at the moment said nothing.

"You didn't get any wine after your day's toil, Master Graham," said the judge.

"Indeed I did, Sir. We had some champagne."

"Champagne, had you? Then I ought to have waited for my guest, for I got none. You had a long day of it in court."

"Yes, indeed, Sir."

"And I am afraid not very satisfactory." To this Graham made no immediate answer, but he could not refrain from thinking that the day, taken altogether, had been satisfactory to him.

And then Baker came into the room, and going close up to Lady Staveley, whispered something in her ear. "Oh, ah, yes," said Lady Staveley. "I must wish you good-night, Mr. Graham." And she took his hand, pressing it very warmly. But though she wished him good-night then, she saw him again before he went to bed. It was a family in which all home affairs were very dear, and a new son could not be welcomed into it without much expression of affection.

"Well, Sir! and how have you sped since dinner?" the judge asked as soon as the door was closed behind his wife.

"I have proposed to your daughter and she

has accepted me." And as he said so he rose from the chair in which he had just now seated himself.

"Then, my boy, I hope you will make her a good husband;" and the judge gave him his hand.

"I will try to do so. I cannot but feel, however, how little right I had to ask her, seeing that I am likely to be so poor a man."

"Well, well, well,—we will talk of that another time. At present we will only sing your triumphs—

"So faithful in love, and so dauntless in war,
There never was knight like the young Lochinvar."

"Felix, my dear fellow, I congratulate you with all my heart," said Augustus. "But I did not know you were good as a warrior."

"Ah, but he is though," said the judge. "What do you think of his wounds? And if all that I hear be true, he has other battles on hand. But we must not speak about that till this poor lady's trial is over."

"I need hardly tell you, Sir," said Graham, with that sheep-like air which a man always carries on such occasions, "that I regard myself as the most fortunate man in the world."

"Quite unnecessary," said the judge. "On such occasions that is taken as a matter of course." And then the conversation between them for the next ten minutes was rather dull and flat.

Up stairs the same thing was going on, in a manner somewhat more animated, between the mother and daughter,—for ladies on such occasions can be more animated than men.

"Oh, mamma, you must love him," Madeline said.

"Yes, my dear; of course I shall love him now. Your papa says that he is very clever."

"I know papa likes him. I knew that from the very first. I think that was the reason why——"

"And I suppose clever people are the best,—that is to say, if they are good."

"And isn't he good?"

"Well—I hope so. Indeed, I'm sure he is. Mr. Orme was a very good young man too;—but it's no good talking about him now."

"Mamma, that never could have come to pass."

"Very well, my dear. It's over now, and of course all that I looked for was your happiness."

"I know that, mamma; and indeed I am very happy. I'm sure I could not ever have liked any one else since I first knew him."

Lady Staveley still thought it very odd, but she had nothing else to say. As regarded the pecuniary considerations of the affair she left them altogether to her husband, feeling that in this way she could relieve herself from misgivings which might otherwise make her unhappy. "And after all I don't know that his ugliness signifies," she said to herself. And so she made up her mind that she would be loving and affectionate to him, and sat up till she heard his footsteps in the passage, in order that she might speak to him, and make him welcome to the privileges of a son-in-law.

"Mr. Graham," she said, opening her door as he passed by.

"Of course she has told you," said Felix.

"Oh yes, she has told me. We don't have many secrets in this house. And I'm sure I congratulate you with all my heart; and I think you have got the very best girl in all the world. Of course I'm her mother;

but I declare, if I was to talk of her for a week, I could not say anything of her but good."

"I know how fortunate I am."

"Yes, you are fortunate. For there is nothing in the world equal to a loving wife who will do her duty. And I'm sure you'll be good to her."

"I will endeavour to be so."

"A man must be very bad indeed who would be bad to her,—and I don't think that of you. And it's a great thing, Mr. Graham, that Madeline should have loved a man of whom her papa is so fond. I don't know what you have done to the judge, I'm sure." This she said, remembering in the innocence of her heart that Mr. Arbuthnot had been a son-in-law rather after her own choice, and that the judge always declared that his eldest daughter's husband had seldom much to say for himself.

"And I hope that Madeline's mother will receive me as kindly as Madeline's father," said he, taking Lady Staveley's hand and pressing it.

"Indeed I will. I will love you very dearly if you will let me. My girls' husbands are the same to me as sons." Then she put up her face and he kissed it, and so they wished each other good-night.

He found Augustus in his own room, and they two had hardly sat themselves down over the fire, intending to recall the former scenes which had taken place in that very room, when a knock was heard at the door, and Mrs. Baker entered.

"And so it's all settled, Mr. Felix," said she.

"Yes," said he; "all settled."

"Well now! didn't I know it from the first?"

"Then what a wicked old woman you were not to tell," said Augustus.

"That's all very well, Master Augustus. How would you like me to tell of you;—for I could, you know?"

"You wicked old woman, you couldn't do anything of the kind."

"Oh, couldn't I? But I defy all the world to say a word of Miss Madeline but what's good,—only I did know all along which way the wind was blowing. Lord love you, Mr. Graham, when you came in here all of a smash like, I knew it wasn't for nothing."

"You think he did it on purpose then," said Staveley.

"Did it on purpose? What; make up to Miss Madeline? Why, of course he did it on purpose. He's been a-thinking of it ever since Christmas night, when I saw you Master Augustus, and a certain young lady when you came out into the dark passage together."

"That's a downright falsehood, Mrs. Baker."

"Oh—very well. Perhaps I was mistaken. But now, Mr. Graham, if you don't treat our Miss Madeline well——"

"That's just what I've been telling him," said her brother. "If he uses her ill, as he did his former wife—breaks her heart as he did with that one——"

"His former wife!" said Mrs. Baker.

"Haven't you heard of that? Why, he's had two already."

"Two wives already! Oh now, Master Augustus, what an old fool I am ever to believe a word that comes out of your mouth." Then having uttered her blessing, and having had her hand cordially grasped by this new scion of the Staveley family, the old woman left the young men to themselves, and went to her bed.

"Now that it is done——" said Felix.

" You wish it were undone."

" No, by Heaven! I think I may venture to say that it will never come to me to wish that. But now that it is done, I am astonished at my own impudence almost as much as at my success. Why should your father have welcomed me to his house as his son-in-law, seeing how poor are my prospects?"

" Just for that reason; and because he is so different from other men. I have no doubt that he is proud of Madeline for having liked a man with an ugly face and no money."

" If I had been beautiful like you, I shouldn't have had a chance with him."

" Not if you'd been weighted with money also. Now, as for myself, I confess I'm not nearly so magnanimous as my father, and, for Mad's sake, I do hope you will get rid of your vagaries. An income, I know, is a very commonplace sort of thing; but when a man has a family there are comforts attached to it."

" I am at any rate willing to work," said Graham somewhat moodily.

" Yes, if you may work exactly in your own way. But men in the world can't do that. A man, as I take it, must through life allow himself to be governed by the united wisdom of others around him. He cannot take upon himself to judge as to every step by his own lights. If he does, he will be dead before he has made up his mind as to the preliminaries." And in this way Augustus Staveley from the depth of his life's experience spoke words of worldly wisdom to his future brother-in-law.

On the next morning before he started again for Alston and his now odious work, Graham succeeded in getting Madeline to himself for five minutes. " I

saw both your father and mother last night," said he,
"and I shall never forget their goodness to me."

"Yes, they are good."

"It seems like a dream to me that they should have
accepted me as their son-in-law."

"But it is no dream to me, Felix;—or if so, I do not
mean to wake any more. I used to think that I should
never care very much for anybody out of my own
family;—but now——" And she then pressed her little
hand upon his arm.

"And Felix," she said, as he prepared to leave her,
"you are not to go away from Noningsby when the
trial is over. I wanted mamma to tell you, but she said
I'd better do it."

CHAPTER XXI

THE LAST DAY

MRS. ORME was up very early on that last morning of the trial, and had dressed herself before Lady Mason was awake. It was now March, but yet the morning light was hardly sufficient for her as she went through her toilette. They had been told to be in the court very punctually at ten, and in order to do so they must leave Orley Farm at nine. Before that, as had been arranged over night, Lucius was to see his mother.

"You haven't told him! he doesn't know!" were the first words which Lady Mason spoke as she raised her head from the pillow. But then she remembered. "Ah! yes," she said, as she again sank back and hid her face, "he knows it all now."

"Yes, dear; he knows it all; and is it not better so? He will come and see you, and when that is over you will be more comfortable than you have been for years past."

Lucius also had been up early, and when he learned that Mrs. Orme was dressed, he sent up to her begging that he might see her. Mrs. Orme at once went to him, and found him seated at the breakfast table with his head resting on his arm. His face was pale and haggard, and his hair was uncombed. He had not been undressed that night, and his clothes hung on him as they always do hang on a man who has passed a sleepless night in them. To Mrs. Orme's inquiry after himself he answered not a word, nor did he at first ask after

his mother. "That was all true that you told me last night?"

"Yes, Mr. Mason; it was true."

"And she and I must be outcasts for ever. I will endeavour to bear it, Mrs. Orme. As I did not put an end to my life last night I suppose that I shall live and bear it. Does she expect to see me?"

"I told her that you would come to her this morning."

"And what shall I say? I would not condemn my own mother; but how can I not condemn her?"

"Tell her at once that you will forgive her."

"But it will be a lie. I have not forgiven her. I loved my mother and esteemed her as a pure and excellent woman. I was proud of my mother. How can I forgive her for having destroyed such feelings as those?"

"There should be nothing that a son would not forgive his mother."

"Ah! that is so easily spoken. Men talk of forgiveness when their anger rankles deepest in their hearts. In the course of years I shall forgive her. I hope I shall. But to say that I can forgive her now would be a farce. She has broken my heart, Mrs. Orme.

"And has not she suffered herself? Is not her heart broken?"

"I have been thinking of that all night. I cannot understand how she should have lived for the last six months. Well; is it time that I should go to her?"

Mrs. Orme again went up stairs, and after another interval of half an hour returned to fetch him. She almost regretted that she had undertaken to bring them together on that mornng, thinking that it might have been better to postpone the interview till the trial should be over. She had expected that Lucius would have been

softer in his manner. But it was too late for any such thought.

"You will find her dressed now, Mr. Mason," said she; "but I conjure you, as you hope for mercy yourself, to be merciful to her. She is your mother, and though she has injured you by her folly, her heart has been true to you through it all. Go now, and remember that harshness to any woman is unmanly."

"I can only act as I think best," he replied in that low, stern voice which was habitual to him; and then with slow steps he went up to his mother's room.

When he entered it she was standing with her eyes fixed upon the door and her hands clasped together. So she stood till he had closed the door behind him, and had taken a few steps on towards the centre of the room. Then she rushed forward, and throwing herself on the ground before him clasped him round the knees with her arms. "My boy, my boy!" she said. And then she lay there bathing his feet with her tears.

"Oh! mother, what is this that she has told me?"

But Lady Mason at the moment spoke no further words. It seemed as though her heart would have burst with sobs, and when for a moment she lifted up her face to his, the tears were streaming down her cheeks. Had it not been for that relief she could not have borne the sufferings which were heaped upon her.

"Mother, get up," he said. "Let me raise you. It is dreadful that you should lie there. Mother, let me lift you." But she still clung to his knees, grovelling on the ground before him. "Lucius, Lucius," she said, and she then sank away from him as though the strength of her muscles would no longer allow her to cling to him. She sank away from him and lay along the ground hiding her face upon the floor.

"Mother," he said, taking her gently by the arm as he knelt at her side, "if you will rise I will speak to you."

"Your words will kill me," she said. "I do not dare to look at you. Oh, Lucius, will you ever forgive me?"

And yet she had done it all for him. She had done a rascally deed, an hideous cut-throat deed, but it had been done altogether for him. No thought of her own aggrandisement had touched her mind when she resolved upon that forgery. As Rebekah had deceived her lord and robbed Esau, the firstborn, of his birth-right, so had she robbed him who was as Esau to her. How often had she thought of that, while her conscience was pleading hard against her! Had it been imputed as a crime to Rebekah that she had loved her own son well, and loving him had put a crown upon his head by means of her matchless guile. Did she love Lucius, her babe, less than Rebekah had loved Jacob? And had she not striven with the old man, struggling that she might do this just thing without injustice, till in his anger he had thrust her from him. "I will not break my promise for the brat," the old man had said;—and then she did the deed. But all that was as nothing now. She felt no comfort now from that Bible story which had given her such encouragement before the thing was finished. Now the result of evil-doing had come full home to her, and she was seeking pardon with a broken heart, while burning tears furrowed her cheeks,—not from him whom she had thought to injure, but from the child of her own bosom, for whose prosperity she had been so anxious.

Then she slowly arose and allowed him to place her upon the sofa. "Mother," he said, "it is all over here."

"Ah! yes."

"Whither we had better go, I cannot yet say,—or when. We must wait till this day is ended."

"Lucius, I care nothing for myself,—nothing. It is nothing to me whether or no they say that I am guilty. It is of you only that I am thinking."

"Our lot, mother, must still be together. If they find you guilty you will be imprisoned, and then I will go, and come back when they release you. For you and me the future world will be very different from the past."

"It need not be so,—for you, Lucius. I do not wish to keep you near me now."

"But I shall be near you. Where you hide your shame there will I hide mine. In this world there is nothing left for us. But there is another world before you,—if you can repent of your sin." This too he said very sternly, standing somewhat away from her, and frowning the while with those gloomy eyebrows. Sad as was her condition he might have given her solace, could he have taken her by the hand and kissed her. Peregrine Orme would have done so, or Augustus Staveley, could it have been possible that they should have found themselves in that position. Though Lucius Mason could not do so, he was not less just than they, and, it may be, not less loving in his heart. He could devote himself for his mother's sake as absolutely as could they. But to some is given and to some is denied that curse of heavenly balm with which all wounds can be assuaged and sore hearts ever relieved of some portion of their sorrow. Of all the virtues with which man can endow himself surely none other is so odious as that justice which can teach itself to look down upon mercy almost as a vice!

"I will not ask you to forgive me," she said plaintively.

"Mother," he answered, "were I to say that I forgave you my words would be a mockery. I have no right either to condemn or to forgive. I accept my position as it has been made for me, and will endeavour to do my duty."

It would have been almost better for her that he should have upbraided her for her wickedness. She would then have fallen again prostrate before him, if not in body at least in spirit, and her weakness would have stood for her in the place of strength. But now it was necessary that she should hear his words and bear his looks,—bear them like a heavy burden on her back without absolutely sinking. It had been that necessity of bearing and never absolutely sinking which, during years past, had so tried and tested the strength of her heart and soul. Seeing that she had not sunk, we may say that her strength had been very wonderful.

And then she stood up and came close to him. "But you will give me your hand, Lucius?"

"Yes, mother; there is my hand. I shall stand by you through it all." But he did not offer to kiss her; and there was still some pride in her heart which would not allow her to ask him for an embrace.

"And now," he said, "it is time that you should prepare to go. Mrs. Orme thinks it better that I should not accompany you."

"No, Lucius, no; you must not hear them proclaim my guilt in court."

"That would make but little difference. But nevertheless I will not go. Had I known this before I should not have gone there. It was to testify my belief in your innocence; nay, my conviction——"

"Oh, Lucius, spare me!"

"Well, I will speak of it no more. I shall be here to-night when you come back."

"But if they say that I am guilty they will take me away."

"If so I will come to you,—in the morning if they will let me. But, mother, in any case I must leave this house to-morrow." Then again he gave her his hand, but he left her without touching her with his lips.

When the two ladies appeared in court together without Lucius Mason there was much questioning among the crowd as to the cause of his absence. Both Dockwrath and Joseph Mason looked at it in the right light, and accepted it as a ground for renewed hope. "He dare not face the verdict," said Dockwrath. And yet when they had left the court on the preceding evening, after listening to Mr. Furnival's speech, their hopes had not been very high. Dockwrath had not admitted with words that he feared defeat, but when Mason had gnashed his teeth as he walked up and down his room at Alston, and striking the table with his clenched fist had declared his fears, "By Heavens they will escape me again!" Dockwrath had not been able to give him substantial comfort. "The jury are not such fools as to take all that for gospel," he had said. But he had not said it with that tone of assured conviction which he had always used till Mr. Furnival's speech had been made. There could have been no greater attestation to the power displayed by Mr. Furnival than Mr. Mason's countenance as he left the court on that evening. "I suppose it will cost me hundreds of pounds," he said to Dockwrath that evening. "Orley Farm will pay for it all," Dockwrath had answered; but his answer had shown no confidence. And, if we think well of it, Joseph Mason was deserving of pity. He wanted only what

was his own; and that Orley Farm ought to be his own he had not the smallest doubt. Mr. Furnival had not in the least shaken him; but he had made him feel that others would be shaken. "If it could only be left to the judge," thought Mr. Mason to himself. And then he began to consider whether this British palladium of an unanimous jury had not in it more of evil than of good.

Young Peregrine Orme again met his mother at the door of the court, and at her instance gave his arm to Lady Mason. Mr. Aram was also there; but Mr. Aram had great tact, and did not offer his arm to Mrs. Orme, contenting himself with making a way for her and walking beside her. "I am glad that her son has not come to-day," he said, not bringing his head suspiciously close to hers, but still speaking so that none but she might hear him. "He has done all the good that he could do, and as there is only the judge's charge to hear, the jury will not notice his absence. Of course we hope for the best, Mrs. Orme, but it is doubtful."

As Felix Graham took his place next to Chaffanbrass, the old lawyer scowled at him, turning his red old savage eyes first on him and then from him, growling the while, so that the whole court might notice it. The legal portion of the court did notice it and were much amused. "Good-morning, Mr. Chaffanbrass," said Graham quite aloud as he took his seat; and then Chaffanbrass growled again. Considering the lights with which he had been lightened, there was a species of honesty about Mr. Chaffanbrass which certainly deserved praise. He was always true to the man whose money he had taken, and gave to his customer, with all the power at his command, that assistance which he had professed to sell. But we may give the same praise to the hired bravo who goes through with truth and

courage the task which he has undertaken. I knew an assassin in Ireland who professed that during twelve years of practice in Tipperary he had never failed when he had once engaged himself. For truth and honesty to their customers—which are great virtues—I would bracket that man and Mr. Chaffanbrass together.

And then the judge commenced his charge, and as he went on with it he repeated all the evidence that was in any way of moment, pulling the details to pieces, and dividing that which bore upon the subject from that which did not. This he did with infinite talent and with a perspicuity beyond all praise. But to my thinking it was remarkable that he seemed to regard the witnesses as a dissecting surgeon may be supposed to regard the subjects on which he operates for the advancement of science. With exquisite care he displayed what each had said and how the special saying of one bore on that special saying of another. But he never spoke of them as though they had been live men and women who were themselves as much entitled to justice at his hands as either the prosecutor in this matter or she who was being prosecuted; who, indeed, if anything, were better entitled unless he could show that they were false and suborned; for unless they were suborned or false they were there doing a painful duty to the public, for which they were to receive no pay and from which they were to obtain no benefit. Of whom else in that court could so much be said? The judge there had his ermine and his canopy, his large salary and his seat of honour. And the lawyers had their wigs, and their own loud voices, and their places of precedence. The attorneys had their seats and their big tables, and the somewhat familiar respect of the tipstaves. The jury, though not much to be envied, were addressed with respect and

flattery, had their honourable seats, and were invariably at least called gentlemen. But why should there be no seat of honour for the witnesses? To stand in a box, to be bawled after by the police, to be scowled at and scolded by the judge, to be browbeaten and accused falsely by the barristers, and then to be condemned as perjurors by the jury,—that is the fate of the one person who during the whole trial is perhaps entitled to the greatest respect, and is certainly entitled to the most public gratitude. Let the witness have a big arm-chair, and a canopy over him, and a man behind him with a red cloak to do him honour and keep the flies off; let him be gently invited to come forward from such inner room where he can sit before a fire. Then he will be able to speak out, making himself heard without scolding, and will perhaps be able to make a fair fight with the cocks who can crow so loudly on their own dung-hills.

The judge in this case did his work with admirable skill, blowing aside the froth of Mr. Furnival's eloquence, and upsetting the sophistry and false deductions of Mr. Chaffanbrass. The case for the jury, as he said, hung altogether upon the evidence of Kenneby and the woman Bolster. As far as he could see, the evidence of Dockwrath had little to do with it; and alleged malice and greed on the part of Dockwrath could have nothing to do with it. The jury might take it as proved that Lady Mason at the former trial had sworn that she had been present when her husband signed the codicil and had seen the different signatures affixed to it. They might also take it as proved, that that other deed—the deed purporting to close a partnership between Sir Joseph Mason and Mr. Martock,—had been executed on the 14th of July, and that it had been signed by Sir

Joseph, and also by those two surviving witnesses, Kenneby and Bolster. The question, therefore, for the consideration of the jury had narrowed itself to this: had two deeds been executed by Sir Joseph Mason, both bearing the same date? If this had not been done, and if that deed with reference to the partnership were a true deed, then must the other be false and fraudulent; and if false and fraudulent, then must Lady Mason have sworn falsely, and been guilty of that perjury with which she was now charged. There might, perhaps, be one loophole to this argument by which an escape was possible. Though both deeds bore the date of 14th July, there might have been error in this. It was possible, though no doubt singular, that that date should have been inserted in the partnership deed, and the deed itself be executed afterwards. But then the woman Bolster told them that she had been called to act as witness but once in her life, and if they believed her in that statement, the possibility of error as to the date would be of little or no avail on behalf of Lady Mason. For himself, he could not say that adequate ground had been shown for charging Bolster with swearing falsely. No doubt she had been obstinate in her method of giving her testimony, but that might have arisen from an honest resolution on her part not to allow herself to be shaken. The value of her testimony must, however, be judged by the jury themselves. As regarded Kenneby, he must say that the man had been very stupid. No one who had heard him would accuse him for a moment of having intended to swear falsely, but the jury might perhaps think that the testimony of such a man could not be taken as having much value with reference to circumstances which happened more than twenty years since.

The charge took over two hours, but the substance of it has been stated. Then the jury retired to consider their verdict, and the judge, and the barristers, and some other jury proceeded to the business of some other and less important trial. Lady Mason and Mrs. Orme sat for a while in their seats—perhaps for a space of twenty minutes—and then, as the jury did not at once return into court, they retired to the sitting-room in which they had first been placed. Here Mr. Aram accompanied them, and here they were met by Peregrine Orme.

"His lordship's charge was very good—very good, indeed," said Mr. Aram.

"Was it?" asked Peregrine.

"And very much in our favour," continued the attorney.

"You think then," said Mrs. Orme, looking up into his face, "you think that—" But she did not know how to go on with her question.

"Yes, I do. I think we shall have a verdict; I do, indeed. I would not say so before Lady Mason if my opinion was not very strong. The jury may disagree. That is not improbable. But I cannot anticipate that the verdict will be against us."

There was some comfort in this; but how wretched was the nature of the comfort! Did not the attorney, in every word which he spoke, declare his own conviction of his client's guilt. Even Peregrine Orme could not say out boldly that he felt sure of an acquittal because no other verdict could be justly given. And then why was not Mr. Furnival there, taking his friend by the hand and congratulating her that her troubles were so nearly over? Mr. Furnival at this time did not come near her; and had he done so, what could he have said to her?

He and Sir Richard Leatherham left the court together, and the latter went at once back to London, without waiting to hear the verdict. Mr. Chaffanbrass also, and Felix Graham retired from the scene of their labours, and as they did so, a few words were spoken between them.

"Mr. Graham," said the ancient hero of the Old Bailey, "you are too great for this kind of work, I take it. If I were you, I would keep out of it for the future."

"I am very much of the same way of thinking, Mr. Chaffanbrass," said the other.

"If a man undertakes a duty, he should do it. That's my opinion, though I confess it's a little old fashioned; especially if he takes money for it, Mr. Graham." And then the old man glowered at him with his fierce eyes, and nodded his head and went on. What could Graham say to him? His answer would have been ready enough had there been time or place in which to give it. But he had no answer ready which was fit for the crowded hall of the court-house, and so Mr. Chaffanbrass went on his way. He will now pass out of sight, and we will say of him, that he did his duty well according to his lights.

There, in that little room, sat Lady Mason and Mrs. Orme till late in the evening, and there, with them, remained Peregrine. Some sort of refreshment was procured for them, but of the three days they passed in the court, that, perhaps, was the most oppressive. There was no employment for them, and then the suspense was terrible! That suspense became worse and worse as the hours went on, for it was clear that at any rate some of the jury were anxious to give a verdict against her. "They say that there's eight and four," said Mr. Aram,

at one of the many visits which he made to them; "but there's no saying how true that may be."

"Eight and four!" said Peregrine.

"Eight to acquit, and four for guilty," said Aram.
"If so, we're safe, at any rate, till the next assizes."

But it was not fated that Lady Mason should be sent away from the court in doubt. At eight o'clock Mr. Aram came to them, hot with haste and told them that the jury had sent for the judge. The judge had gone home to his dinner, but would return to court at once when he heard that the jury had agreed.

"And must we go into court again?" said Mrs. Orme.

"Lady Mason must do so."

"Then of course I shall go with her. Are you ready now, dear?"

Lady Mason was unable to speak, but she signified that she was ready, and then they went into court. The jury were already in the box, and as the two ladies took their seats, the judge entered. But few of the gas-lights were lit, so that they in the court could hardly see each other, and the remaining ceremony did not take five minutes."

"Not guilty, my lord," said the foreman. Then the verdict was recorded, and the judge went back to his dinner. Joseph Mason and Dockwrath were present and heard the verdict. I will leave the reader to imagine with what an appetite they returned to their chamber.

CHAPTER XXII

I LOVE HER STILL

It was all over now, and as Lucius had said to his mother, there was nothing left for them but to go and hide themselves. The verdict had reached him before his mother's return, and on the moment of his hearing it he sat down and commenced the following letter to Mr. Furnival:—

“Orley Farm, March —, 18—

“DEAR SIR,

“I beg to thank you, in my mother's name, for your great exertions in the late trial. I must acknowledge that I have been wrong in thinking that you gave her bad advice, and am now convinced that you acted with the best judgment on her behalf. May I beg that you will add to your great kindness by inducing the gentlemen who undertook the management of the case as my mother's attorneys to let me know as soon as possible in what sum I am indebted to them?

“I believe I need trouble you with no preamble as to my reasons when I tell you that I have resolved to abandon immediately any title that I may have to the possession of Orley Farm, and to make over the property at once, in any way that may be most efficacious, to my half-brother, Mr. Joseph Mason, of Groby Park. I so strongly feel the necessity of doing this at once, without even a day's delay, that I shall take my mother to lodgings in London to-morrow, and shall then decide

on what steps it may be best that we shall take. My mother will be in possession of about £200 a year, subject to such deduction as the cost of the trial may make from it.

"I hope that you will not think that I intrude upon you too far when I ask you to communicate with my brother's lawyers on the subject of this surrender. I do not know how else to do it; and of course you will understand that I wish to screen my mother's name as much as may be in my power with due regard to honesty. I hope I need not insist on the fact,—for it is a fact,—that nothing will change my purpose as to this. If I cannot have it done through you, I must myself go to Mr. Round. I am, moreover, aware that in accordance with strict justice my brother should have upon me a claim for the proceeds of the estate since the date of our father's death. If he wishes it I will give him such claim, making myself his debtor by any form that may be legal. He must, however, in such case be made to understand that his claim will be against a beggar; but, nevertheless, it may suit his views to have such a claim upon me. I cannot think that, under the circumstances, I should be justified in calling on my mother to surrender her small income; but should you be of a different opinion, it shall be done.

"I write thus to you at once as I think that not a day should be lost. I will trouble you with another line from London, to let you know what is our immediate address.

"Pray believe me to be

"Yours, faithfully and obliged,

"LUCIUS MASON.

"T. Furnival, Esq.,

"Old Square, Lincoln's Inn Fields."

As soon as he had completed this letter, which was sufficiently good for its purpose, and clearly explained what was the writer's will on the subject of it, he wrote another, which I do not think was equally efficacious. The second was addressed to Miss Furnival, and being a love letter, was not so much within the scope of the writer's peculiar powers.

" DEAREST SOPHIA,

" I hardly know how to address you; or what I should tell you or what conceal. Were we together, and was that promise renewed which you once gave me, I should tell you all; but this I cannot do by letter. My mother's trial is over, and she is acquitted; but that which I have learned during the trial has made me feel that I am bound to relinquish to my brother-in-law all my title to Orley Farm, and I have already taken the first steps towards doing so. Yes, Sophia, I am now a beggar on the face of the world. I have nothing belonging to me, save those powers of mind and body which God has given me; and I am, moreover, a man oppressed with a terribly heavy load of grief. For some short time I must hide myself with my mother; and then, when I shall have been able to brace my mind to work, I shall go forth and labour in whatever field may be open to me.

" But before I go, Sophia, I wish to say a word of farewell to you, that I may understand on what terms we part. Of course I make no claim. I am aware that that which I now tell you must be held as giving you a valid excuse for breaking any contract that there may have been between us. But, nevertheless, I have hope. That I love you very dearly I need hardly now say; and I still venture to think that the time may come when

I shall again prove myself to be worthy of your hand. If you have ever loved me you cannot cease to do so merely because I am unfortunate; and if you love me still, perhaps you will consent to wait. If you will do so,—if you will say that I am rich in that respect,—I shall go to my banishment not altogether a downcast man. May I say that I am still your own

“LUCIUS MASON?”

No; he decidedly might not say so. But as the letter was not yet finished when his mother and Mrs. Orme returned, I will not anticipate matters by giving Miss Furnival's reply.

Mrs. Orme came back that night to Orley Farm, but without the intention of remaining there. Her task was over, and it would be well that she should return to The Cleeve. Her task was over; and as the hour must come in which she should leave the mother in the hands of her son, the present hour would be as good as any.

They again went together to the room which they had shared for the last night or two, and there they parted. They had not been there long when the sound of wheels was heard on the gravel, and Mrs. Orme got up from her seat. “There is Peregrine with the carriage,” said she.

“And you are going?” said Lady Mason.

“If I could do you good, I would stay,” said Mrs. Orme.

“No, no; of course you must go. Oh, my darling, oh, my friend,” and she threw herself into the other's arms.

“Of course I will write to you,” said Mrs. Orme. “I will do so regularly.”

"May God bless you forever. But it is needless to ask for blessings on such as you. You are blessed."

"And you too;—if you will turn to Him you will be blessed."

"Ah me. Well, I can try now. I feel that I can at any rate try."

"And none who try ever fail. And now, dear, good-bye."

"Good-bye, my angel. But, Mrs. Orme, I have one word I must first say; a message that I must send to him. Tell him this, that never in my life have I loved any man as well as I have loved him and as I do love him. That on my knees I beg his pardon for the wrong I have done him."

"But he knows how great has been your goodness to him."

"When the time came I was not quite a devil to drag him down with me to utter destruction!"

"He will always remember what was your conduct then."

"But tell him, that though I loved him, and though I loved you with all my heart,—with all my heart,—I knew through it all, as I know now, that I was not a fitting friend for him or you. No; do not interrupt me, I always knew it; and though it was so sweet to me to see your faces, I would have kept away; but that he would not have it. I came to him to assist me because he was great and strong, and he took me to his bosom with his kindness, till I destroyed his strength; though his greatness nothing can destroy."

"No, no; he does not think that you have injured him."

"But tell him what I say; and tell him that a poor

bruised, broken creature, who knows at least her own vileness, will pray for him night and morning. And now good-bye. Of my heart towards you I cannot speak."

"Good-bye, then, and, Lady Mason, never despair. There is always room for hope; and where there is hope there need not be unhappiness."

Then they parted, and Mrs. Orme went down to her son.

"Mother, the carriage is here," he said.

"Yes, I heard it. Where is Lucius? Good-bye, Mr. Mason."

"God bless you, Mrs. Orme. Believe me I know how good you have been to us."

As she gave him her hand, she spoke a few words to him. "My last request to you, Mr. Mason, is to beg that you will be tender to your mother."

"I will do my best, Mrs. Orme."

"All her sufferings and your own, have come from her great love for you."

"That I know and feel, but had her ambition for me been less it would have been better for both of us." And there he stood bareheaded at the door while Peregrine Orme handed his mother into the carriage. Thus Mrs. Orme took her last leave of Orley Farm, and was parted from the woman she had loved with so much truth and befriended with so much loyalty.

Very few words were spoken in the carriage between Peregrine and his mother while they were being taken back through Hamworth to The Cleeve. To Peregrine the whole matter was unintelligible. He knew that the verdict had been in favour of Lady Mason, and yet there had been no signs of joy at Orley Farm, or even of contentment. He had heard also from Lucius, while

they had been together for a few minutes, that Orley Farm was to be given up.

"You'll let it, I suppose," Peregrine had asked.

"It will not be mine to let. It will belong to my brother," Lucius had answered. Then Peregrine had asked no further question; nor had Lucius offered any further information.

But his mother, as he knew, was worn out with the work she had done, and at the present moment he felt that the subject was one which would hardly bear questions. So he sat by her side in silence; and before the carriage had reached The Cleeve his mind had turned away from the cares and sorrows of Lady Mason, and was once more at Noningsby. After all, as he said to himself, who could be worse off than he was? He had nothing to hope.

They found Sir Peregrine standing in the hall to receive them, and Mrs. Orme, though she had been absent only three days, could not but perceive the havoc which this trial had made upon him. It was not that the sufferings of those three days had broken him down, but that now, after that short absence, she was able to perceive how great had been upon him the effect of his previous sufferings. He had never held up his head since the day on which Lady Mason had made to him her first confession. Up to that time he had stood erect, and though as he walked his steps had shown that he was no longer young, he had walked with a certain air of strength and manly bearing. Till Lady Mason had come to The Cleeve no one would have said that Sir Peregrine looked as though his energy and life had passed away. But now, as he put his arm round his daughter's waist, and stooped down to kiss her cheek, he was a worn-out, tottering old man.

During these three days he had lived almost altogether alone, and had been ashamed to show to those around him the intense interest which he felt in the result of the trial. His grandson had on each day breakfasted alone, and had left the house before his grandfather was out of his room; and on each evening he had returned late,—as he now returned with his mother,—and had dined alone. Then he had sat with his grandfather for an hour or two, and had been constrained to talk over the events of the day without being allowed to ask Sir Peregrine's opinion as to Lady Mason's innocence or to express his own. These three days had been dreadful to Sir Peregrine. He had not left the house, but had crept about from room to room, ever and again taking up some book or paper and putting it down unread, as his mind reverted to the one subject which now for him bore any interest. On the second of these three days a note had been brought to him from his old friend Lord Alston. "Dear Orme," the note had run, "I am not quite happy as I think of the manner in which we parted the other day. If I offended in any degree, I send this as a peacemaker, and beg to shake your hand heartily. Let me have a line from you to say that it is all right between us. Neither you nor I can afford to lose an old friend at our time of life. Yours always, Alston." But Sir Peregrine had not answered it. Lord Alston's servant had been dismissed with a promise that an answer should be sent, but at the end of the three days it had not yet been written. His mind indeed was still sore towards Lord Alston. The counsel which his old friend had given him was good and true, but it had been neglected, and its very truth and excellence now made the remembrance of it unpalatable. He had, nevertheless, intended

to write; but the idea of such exertion from hour to hour had become more distressing to him.

He had of course heard of Lady Mason's acquittal; and indeed tidings of the decision to which the jury had come went through the country very quickly. There is a telegraphic wire for such tidings which has been very long in use, and which though always used, is as yet but very little understood. How is it that information will spread itself quicker than men can travel, and make its way like water into all parts of the world? It was known all through the country that night that Lady Mason was acquitted; and before the next night it was as well known that she had acknowledged her guilt by giving up the property.

Little could be said as to the trial while Peregrine remained in the room with his mother and his grandfather; but this he had the tact to perceive and soon left them together. "I shall see you, mother, up stairs before you go to bed," he said as he sauntered out.

"But you must not keep her up," said his grandfather. "Remember all that she has gone through." With this injunction he went off, and as he sat alone in his mother's room he tried to come to some resolution as to Noningsby. He knew he had no ground for hope; —no chance, as he would have called it. And if so, would it not be better that he should take himself off? Nevertheless he would go to Noningsby once more. He would not be such a coward but that he would wish her good-bye before he went, and hear the end of it all from her own lips.

When he had left the room, Lady Mason's last message was given to Sir Peregrine. "Poor soul, poor soul!" he said, as Mrs. Orme began her story. "Her son knows it all then now."

"I told him last night,—with her consent; so that he should not go in to the court to-day. It would have been very bad, you know, if they had—found her guilty."

"Yes, yes; very bad—very bad indeed. Poor creature! And so you told him. How did he bear it?"

"On the whole, well. At first he would not believe me."

"As for me, I could not have done it. I could not have told him."

"Yes, Sir, you would;—you would, if it had been required of you."

"I think it would have killed me. But a woman can do things for which a man's courage would never be sufficient. And he bore it manfully."

"He was very stern."

"Yes;—and he will be stern. Poor soul!—I pity her from my very heart. But he will not desert her; he will do his duty by her."

"I am sure he will. In that respect he is a good young man."

"Yes, my dear. He is one of those who seem by nature created to bear adversity. No trouble or sorrow would I think crush him. But had prosperity come to him, it would have made him odious to all around him. You were not present when they met?"

"No—I thought it better to leave them."

"Yes, yes. And he will give up the place at once."

"To-morrow he will do so. In that at any rate he has true spirit. To-morrow early they will go to London, and she I suppose will never see Orley Farm again." And then Mrs. Orme gave Sir Peregrine that last message—"I tell you everything as she told me," Mrs. Orme said, seeing how deeply he was affected. "Perhaps I am wrong."

"No, no, no," he said.

"Coming at such a moment, her words seemed to be almost sacred."

"They are sacred. They shall be sacred. Poor soul, poor soul?"

"She did a great crime."

"Yes, yes."

"But if a crime can be forgiven,—can be excused on account of its motives——"

"It cannot, my dear. Nothing can be forgiven on that ground."

"No; we know that; we all feel sure of that. But yet how can one help loving her? For myself, I shall love her always."

"And I also love her." And then the old man made his confession. "I loved her well;—better than I had ever thought to love any one again, but you and Perry. I loved her very dearly, and felt that I should have been proud to have called her my wife. How beautiful she was in her sorrow, when we thought that her life had been pure and good!"

"And it had been good,—for many years past."

"No; for the stolen property was still there. But yet how graceful she was, and how well her sorrows sat upon her! What might she not have done had the world used her more kindly, and not sent in her way that sore temptation! She was a woman for a man to have loved to madness."

"And yet how little can she have known of love!"

"I loved her." And as the old man said so he rose to his feet with some show of his old energy. "I loved her,—with all my heart! It is foolish for an old man so to say; but I did love her; nay I love her still. But that I knew it would be wrong,—for your sake, and for

Perry's——” And then he stopped himself, as though he would fain hear what she might say to him.

“Yes; it is all over now,” she said in the softest, sweetest, lowest voice. She knew that she was breaking down a last hope, but she knew also that that hope was vain. And then there was silence in the room for some ten minutes’ space.

“It is all over,” he then said, repeating her last words.

“But you have us still,—Perry and me. Can any one love you better than we do?” And she got up and went over to him and stood by him, and leaned upon him.

“Edith, my love, since you came to my house there has been an angel in it watching over me. I shall know that always; and when I turn my face to the wall, as I soon shall, that shall be my last earthly thought.” And so in tears they parted for that night. But the sorrow that was bringing him to his grave came from the love of which he had spoken. It is seldom that a young man may die from a broken heart; but if an old man have a heart still left to him it is more fragile.

CHAPTER XXIII

JOHN KENNEBY'S DOOM

ON the evening but one after the trial was over Mr. Moulder entertained a few friends to supper at his apartments in Great St. Helen's and it was generally understood that in doing so he intended to celebrate the triumph of Lady Mason. Through the whole affair he had been a strong partisan on her side, had expressed a very loud opinion in favour of Mr. Furnival, and had hoped that that scoundrel Dockwrath would get all that he deserved from the hands of Mr. Chaffanbrass. When the hour of Mr. Dockwrath's punishment had come he had been hardly contented, but the inadequacy of Kenneby's testimony had restored him to good humour, and the verdict had made him triumphant.

"Didn't I know it, old fellow?" he had said, slapping his friend Snengkeld on the back. "When such a low scoundrel as Dockwrath is pitted against a handsome woman like Lady Mason he'll not find a jury in England to give a verdict in his favour." Then he asked Snengkeld to come to his little supper; and Kantwise also he invited, though Kantwise had shown Dockwrath tendencies throughout the whole affair;—but Moulder was fond of Kantwise as a butt for his own sarcasm. Mrs. Smiley, too, was asked, as was natural, seeing that she was the betrothed bride of one of the heroes of the day; and Moulder, in the kindness of his heart, swore that he never was proud, and told Bridget Bolster that

she would be welcome to take a share of what was going.

"Laws, M.," said Mrs. Moulder, when she was told of this. "A chambermaid from an inn! What will Mrs. Smiley say?"

"I ain't going to trouble myself with what Mother Smiley may say or think about my friends. If she don't like it, she may do the other thing. What was she herself when you first knew her?"

"Yes, Moulder; but then money do make a difference, you know."

Bridget Bolster, however, was invited, and she came in spite of the grandeur of Mrs. Smiley. Kenneby also of course was there, but he was not in a happy frame of mind. Since that wretched hour in which he had heard himself described by the judge as too stupid to be held of any account by the jury he had become a melancholy, misanthropic man. The treatment which he received from Mr. Furnival had been very grievous to him, but he had borne with that, hoping that some word of eulogy from the judge would set him right in the public mind. But no such word had come, and poor John Kenneby felt that the cruel hard world was too much for him. He had been with his sister that morning, and words had dropped from him which made her fear that he would wish to postpone his marriage for another space of ten years or so. "Brickfields!" he had said. "What can such a one as I have to do with landed property? I am better as I am."

Mrs. Smiley, however, did not at all seem to think so, and welcomed John Kenneby back from Alston very warmly in spite of the disgrace to which he had been subjected. It was nothing to her that the judge had called her future lord a fool; nor indeed was it anything

to any one but himself. According to Moulder's views it was a matter of course that a witness should be abused. For what other purpose was he had into the court? But deep in the mind of poor Kenneby himself the injurious words lay festering. He had struggled hard to tell the truth, and in doing so had simply proved himself to be an ass. "I ain't fit to live with anybody else but myself," he said to himself, as he waked down Bishopsgate Street.

At this time Mrs. Smiley was not yet there. Bridget had arrived, and had been seated in a chair at one corner of the fire. Mrs. Moulder occupied one end of a sofa opposite, leaving the place of honour at the other end for Mrs. Smiley. Moulder sat immediately in front of the fire in his own easy chair, and Snengkeld and Kantwise were on each side of him. They were of course discussing the trial when Mrs. Smiley was announced; and it was well that she made a diversion by her arrival, for words were beginning to run high.

"A jury of her countrymen has found her innocent," Moulder had said with much heat: "and any one who says she's guilty after that is a libeller and a coward, to my way of thinking. If a jury of her countrymen don't make a woman innocent, what does?"

"Of course she's innocent," said Snengkeld; "from the very moment the words was spoken by the foreman. If any newspaper was to say she wasn't she'd have her action."

"That's all very well," said Kantwise, looking up to the ceiling with his eyes nearly shut. "But you'll see. What'll you bet me, Mr. Moulder, that Joseph Mason don't get the property?"

"Gammon!" answered Moulder.

"Well it may be gammon; but you'll see."

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" said Mrs. Smiley, sailing into the room, "upon my word one hears all you say ever so far down the street."

"And I didn't care if they heard it right away to the Mansion House," said Moulder. "We ain't talking treason, nor yet highway robbery."

Then Mrs. Smiley was welcomed;—her bonnet was taken from her and her umbrella, and she was encouraged to spread herself out over the sofa. "Oh, Mrs. Bolster, the witness!" she said, when Mrs. Moulder went through some little ceremony of introduction. And from the tone of voice it appeared that she was not quite satisfied that Mrs. Bolster should be there as a companion for herself.

"Yes, Ma'am. I was the witness as had never signed but once," said Bridget, getting up and curtseying. Then she sat down again, folding her hands one over the other on her lap.

"Oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Smiley. "But where's the other witness, Mrs. Moulder? He's the one who is a deal more interesting to me. Ha, ha, ha! But as you all know it here, what's the good of not telling the truth? Ha, ha, ha!"

"John's here," said Mrs. Moulder. "Come, John, why don't you show yourself?"

"He's just alive, and that's about all you can say for him," said Moulder.

"Why, what's there been to kill him?" said Mrs. Smiley. "Well, John, I must say you're rather backward in coming forward, considering what there's been between us. You might have come and taken my shawl, I'm thinking."

"Yes, I might," said Kenneby gloomily. "I hope I see you pretty well, Mrs. Smiley."

"Pretty bobbish, thank you. Only I think it might have been Maria between friends like us."

"He's sadly put about by this trial," whispered Mrs. Moulder. "You know he is so tender-hearted that he can't bear to be put upon like another."

"But you didn't want her to be found guilty; did you, John?"

"That I'm sure he didn't," said Moulder. "Why it was the way he gave his evidence that brought her off."

"It wasn't my wish to bring her off," said Kenneby; "nor was it my wish to make her guilty. All I wanted was to tell the truth and do my duty. But it was no use. I believe it never is any use."

"I think you did very well," said Moulder.

"I'm sure Lady Mason ought to be very much obliged to you," said Kantwise.

"Nobody needn't care for what's said to them in a court," said Snengkeld. "I remember when once they wanted to make out that I'd taken a parcel of teas——"

"Stolen, you mean, Sir," suggested Mrs. Smiley.

"Yes; stolen. But it was only done by the opposite side in court, and I didn't think a ha'porth of it. They knew where the teas was well enough."

"Speaking for myself," said Kenneby, "I must say I don't like it."

"But the paper as we signed," said Bridget, "wasn't the old gentleman's will—no more than this is;" and she lifted up her apron. "I'm rightly sure of that."

Then again the battle raged hot and furious, and Moulder became angry with his guest, Bridget Bolster. Kantwise finding himself supported in his views by the principal witness at the trial took heart against the tyranny of Moulder and expressed his opinion, while Mrs. Smiley, with a woman's customary dislike to

another woman, sneered ill-naturedly at the idea of Lady Mason's innocence. Poor Kenneby had been forced to take the middle seat on the sofa between his bride and sister; but it did not appear that the honour of his position had any effect in lessening his gloom or mitigating the severity of the judgment which had been passed on him.

"Wasn't the old gentleman's will!" said Moulder, turning on poor Bridget in his anger with a growl. "But I say it was the old gentleman's will. You never dared say as much as that in court."

"I wasn't asked," said Bridget.

"You weren't asked! Yes, you was asked often enough."

"I'll tell you what it is," said Kantwise, "Mrs. Bolster's right in what she says as sure as your name's Moulder."

"Then as sure as my name's Moulder she's wrong. I suppose we're to think that a chap like you knows more about it than the jury! We all know who your friend is in the matter. I haven't forgot our dinner at Leeds, nor sha'n't in a hurry."

"Now, John," said Mrs. Smiley, "nobody can know the truth of this so well as you do. You've been as close as wax, as was all right till the lady was out of her troubles. That's done and over, and let us hear among friends how the matter really was." And then there was silence among them in order that his words might come forth freely.

"Come, my dear," said Mrs. Smiley with a tone of encouraging love. "There can't be any harm now; can there?"

"Out with it, John," said Moulder. "You're honest, anyways."

"There aint no gammon about you," said Snengkeld.

"Mr. Kenneby can speak if he likes, no doubt," said Kantwise; "though maybe it mayn't be very pleasant to him to do so after all that's come and gone."

"There's nothing that's come and gone that need make our John hold his tongue," said Mrs. Moulder. "He mayn't be just as bright as some of those lawyers, but he's a deal more true-hearted."

"But he can't say as how it was the old gentleman's will as we signed. I'm well assured of that," said Bridget.

But Kenneby, though thus called upon by the united strength of the company to solve all their doubts, still remained silent. "Come lovey," said Mrs. Smiley, putting forth her hand and giving his arm a tender squeeze.

"If you've anything to say to clear that woman's character," said Moulder, "you owe it to society to say it; because she is a woman, and because her enemies is villains." And then again there was silence while they waited for him.

"I think it will go with him to his grave," said Mrs. Smiley, very solemnly.

"I shouldn't wonder," said Snengkeld.

"Then he must give up all idea of taking a wife," said Moulder.

"He won't do that, I'm sure," said Mrs. Smiley.

"That he won't. Will you, John?" said his sister.

"There's no knowing what may happen to me in this world," said Kenneby, "but sometimes I almost think I ain't fit to live in it along with anybody else."

"You'll make him fit, won't you, my dear?" said Mrs. Moulder.

"I don't exactly know what to say about it," said Mrs. Smiley. "If Mr. Kenneby ain't willing, I'm not the woman to bind him to his word, because I've had his promise over and over again, and could prove it by a number of witnesses before any jury in the land. I'm a independent woman as needn't be beholden to any man, and I should never think of damages. Smiley left me comfortable before all the world, and I don't know but what I'm a fool to think of changing. Anyways if Mr. Kenneby——"

"Come, John, why don't you speak to her?" said Mrs. Moulder.

"And what am I to say?" said Kenneby, thrusting himself forth from between the ample folds of the two ladies' dresses. "I'm a blighted man; one on whom the finger of scorn has been pointed. His lordship said that I was—stupid; and perhaps I am."

"She don't think nothing of that, John."

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Smiley.

"As long as a man can pay twenty shillings in the pound and a trifle over, what does it matter if all the judges in the land was to call him stupid?" said Snengkeld.

"Stupid is as stupid does," said Kantwise.

"Stupid be d——," said Moulder.

"Mr. Moulder, there's ladies present," said Mrs. Smiley.

"Come, John, rouse yourself a bit," said his sister. "Nobody here thinks the worse of you for what the judge said."

"Certainly not," said Mrs. Smiley. "And as it becomes me to speak, I'll say my mind. I'm accustomed to speak freely before friends, and as we are all friends here, why should I be ashamed?"

"For the matter of that, nobody says you are," said Moulder.

"And I don't mean, Mr. Moulder. Why should I? I can pay my way, and do what I like with my own, and has people to mind me when I speak, and needn't mind nobody else myself;—and that's more than everybody can say. Here's John Kenneby and I is engaged as man and wife. He won't say as it's not so, I'll be bound."

"No," said Kenneby, "I'm engaged I know."

"When I accepted John Kenneby's hand and heart,—and well I remember the beauteous language in which he expressed his feelings, and always shall,—I told him, that I respected him as a man that would do his duty by a woman, though perhaps he mightn't be so cute in the way of having much to say for himself as some others. 'What's the good,' said I, 'of a man's talking, if so be he's ashamed to meet the baker at the end of the week?' So I listened to the vows he made me, and have considered that he and I was as good as one. Now that he's been put upon by them lawyers, I'm not the woman to turn my back upon him."

"That you're not," said Moulder.

"No I ain't, Mr. Moulder, and so, John, there's my hand again, and you're free to take it if you like." And so saying she put forth her hand almost into his lap.

"Take it, John!" said Mrs. Moulder. But poor Kenneby himself did not seem to be very quick in availing himself of the happiness offered to him. He did raise his right arm slightly; but then he hesitated, and allowed it to fall again between him and his sister.

"Come, John, you know you mean it," said Mrs. Moulder. And then with both her hands she lifted his,

and placed it bodily within the grasp of Mrs. Smiley's which was still held forth to receive it.

"I know I'm engaged," said Kenneby.

"There's no mistake about it," said Moulder.

"There needn't be none," said Mrs. Smiley, softly blushing; "and I will say this of myself—as I have been tempted to give a promise, I'm not the woman to go back from my word. There's my hand, John; and I don't care though all the world hears me say so." And then they sat hand in hand for some seconds, during which poor Kenneby was unable to escape from the grasp of his bride elect. One may say that all chance of final escape for him was now gone by.

"But he can't say as how it was the old gentleman's will as we signed," said Bridget, breaking the silence which ensued.

"And now, ladies and gentlemen," said Kantwise, "as Mrs. Bolster has come back to that matter, I'll tell you something that will surprise you. My friend Mr. Moulder here, who is as hospitable a gentleman as I know anywhere wouldn't just let me speak before."

"That's gammon, Kantwise. I never hindered you from speaking."

"How I do hate that word. If you knew my aversion, Mr. Moulder——"

"I can't pick my words for you, old fellow."

"But what were you going to tell us, Mr. Kantwise?" said Mrs. Smiley.

"Something that will make all your hairs stand on end, I think;" and then he paused and looked round upon them all. It was at this moment that Kenneby succeeded in getting his hand once more to himself. "Something that will surprise you all, or I'm very much mistaken. Lady Mason has confessed her guilt."

He had surprised them all. "You don't say so," exclaimed Mrs. Moulder.

"Confessed her guilt," said Mrs. Smiley. "But what guilt, Mr. Kantwise?"

"She forged the will," said Kantwise.

"I knew that all along," said Bridget Bolster.

"I'm d—— if I believe it," said Moulder.

"You can do as you like about that," said Kantwise; "but she has. And I'll tell you what's more: she and young Mason have already left Orley Farm and given it all up into Joseph Mason's hands."

"But didn't she get a verdict?" asked Snengkeld.

"Yes, she got a verdict. There's no doubt on earth about that."

"Then it's my opinion she can't make herself guilty if she wished it; and as for the property, she can't give it up. The jury has found a verdict, and nobody can go beyond that. If anybody tries she'll have her action against 'em." That was the law as laid down by Snengkeld.

"I don't believe a word of it," said Moulder. "Dockwrath has told him. I'll bet a hat that Kantwise got it from Dockwrath."

It turned out that Kantwise had received his information from Dockwrath; but nevertheless, there was that in his manner, and in the nature of the story as it was told to them, that did produce belief. Moulder for a long time held out, but it became clear at last that even he was shaken: and now, even Kenneby acknowledged his conviction that the signature to the will was not his own.

"I knew very well that I never did it twice," said Bridget Bolster triumphantly, as she sat down to the supper table.

I am inclined to think, that upon the whole the company in Great St. Helen's became more happy as the conviction grew upon them that a great and mysterious crime had been committed, which had baffled two courts of law, and had at last thrust itself forth into the open daylight through the workings of the criminal's conscience. When Kantwise had completed his story, the time had come in which it behoved Mrs. Moulder to descend to the lower regions, and give some aid in preparation of the supper. During her absence the matter was discussed in every way, and on her return, when she was laden with good things, she found that all the party was contented except Moulder and her brother.

"It's a very terrible thing," said Mrs. Smiley, later in the evening, as she sat with her steaming glass of rum and water before her. "Very terrible indeed; ain't it, John? I do wish now I'd gone down and see'd her, I do indeed. Don't you, Mrs. Moulder?"

"If all this is true I should like just to have had a peep at her."

"At any rate we shall have pictures of her in all the papers," said Mrs. Smiley.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE LAST OF THE LAWYERS

"I SHOULD have done my duty by you, Mr. Mason, which those men have not, and you would at this moment have been the owner of Orley Farm."

It will easily be known that these words were spoken by Mr. Dockwrath, and that they were addressed to Joseph Mason. The two men were seated together in Mr. Mason's lodgings at Alston, late on the morning after the verdict had been given, and Mr Dockwrath was speaking out his mind with sufficient freedom. On the previous evening he had been content to put up with the misery of the unsuccessful man, and had not added any reproaches of his own. He also had been cowed by the verdict, and the two had been wretched and crestfallen together. But the attorney since that had slept upon the matter, and had bethought himself that he at any rate would make out his little bill. He could show that Mr. Mason had ruined their joint affairs by his adherence to those London attorneys. Had Mr. Mason listened to the advice of his new adviser all would have been well. So at least Dockwrath was prepared to declare, finding that by so doing he would best pave the way for his own important claim.

But Mr. Mason was not a man to be bullied with tame endurance.

"The firm bears the highest name in the profession, Sir," he said, "and I had just grounds for trusting them."

"And what has come of your just grounds, Mr. Mason? Where are you? That's the question. I say that Round and Crook have thrown you over. They have been hand and glove with old Furnival through the whole transaction; and I'll tell you what's more, Mr. Mason. I told you how it would be from the beginning."

"I'll move for a new trial."

"A new trial; and this a criminal prosecution! She's free of you now for ever, and Orley Farm will belong to that son of hers till he chooses to sell it. It's a pity; that's all. I did my duty by you in a professional way, Mr. Mason; and you won't put the loss on my shoulders."

"I've been robbed;—damnably robbed, that's all that I know."

"There's no mistake on earth about that, Mr. Mason; you have been robbed; and the worst of it is, the costs will be so heavy! You'll be going down to Yorkshire soon I suppose, Sir."

"I don't know where I shall go!" said the squire of Groby, not content to be cross-questioned by the attorney from Hamworth.

"Because it's as well, I suppose, that we should settle something about the costs before you leave. I don't want to press for my money exactly now, but I shall be glad to know when I'm to get it."

"If you have any claim on me, Mr. Dockwrath, you can send it to Mr. Round."

"If I have any claim! What do you mean by that, Sir? And I shall send nothing in to Mr. Round. I have had quite enough of Mr. Round already. I told you from the beginning, Mr. Mason, that I would have nothing to do with this affair as connected with Mr.

Round. I have devoted myself entirely to this matter since you were pleased to engage my services at Groby Park. It is not by my fault that you have failed. I think, Mr. Mason, you will do me the justice to acknowledge that." And then Dockwrath was silent for a moment, as though waiting for an answer.

"I have nothing to say upon the subject, Mr. Dockwrath," said Mason.

"But, by Heaven, something must be said. That won't do at all, Mr. Mason. I presume you do not think that I have been working like a slave for the last four months for nothing."

Mr. Mason was in truth an honest man, and did not wish that any one should work on his account for nothing;—much less did he wish that such a one as Dockwrath should do so. But then, on the other side, in his present frame of mind he was by no means willing to yield anything to any one. "I neither deny nor allow your claim, Mr. Dockwrath," said he. "But I shall pay nothing except through my regular lawyers. You can send your account to me if you please, but I shall send it on to Mr. Round without looking at it."

"Oh, that's to be the way, is it? That your gratitude. Very well, Mr. Mason; I shall now know what to do. And I think you'll find——"

Here Mr. Dockwrath was interrupted by the lodging-house servant, who brought in a note for Mr. Mason. It was from Mr. Furnival, and the girl who delivered it said that the gentleman's messenger was waiting for an answer.

"Sir," said the note,

"A communication has been made to me this morning on the part of your brother, Mr. Lucius Mason.

which may make it desirable that I should have an interview with you. If not inconvenient to you, I would ask you to meet me to-morrow morning at eleven o'clock at the chambers of your own lawyer, Mr. Round, in Bedford Row. I have already seen Mr. Round, and find that he can meet us.

"I am, Sir,

"Your very obedient servant,

"THOMAS FURNIVAL.

"J. Mason, Esq., J. P.
(of Groby Park)."

Mr. Furnival when he wrote this note had already been over to Orley Farm, and had seen Lucius Mason. He had been at the farm almost before daylight, and had come away with the assured conviction that the property must be abandoned by his client.

"We need not talk about it, Mr. Furnival," Lucius had said. "It must be so."

"You have discussed the matter with your mother?"

"No discussion is necessary, but she is quite aware of my intentions. She is prepared to leave the place—for ever."

"But the income——"

"Belongs to my brother Joseph. Mr. Furnival, I think you may understand that the matter is one in which it is necessary that I should act, but as to which I trust I may not have to say many words. If you cannot arrange this for me, I must go to Mr. Round."

Of course Mr. Furnival did understand it all. His client had been acquitted, and he had triumphed; but he had known for many a long day that the estate did belong of right to Mr. Mason of Groby; and though he had not suspected that Lucius would have been so told,

he could not be surprised at the result of such telling. It was clear to him that Lady Mason had confessed, and that restitution would therefore be made.

"I will do your bidding," said he.

"And, Mr. Furnival—if it be possible, spare my mother." Then the meeting was over, and Mr. Furnival returning to Hamworth wrote his note to Mr. Joseph Mason.

Mr. Dockwrath had been interrupted by the messenger in the middle of his threat, but he caught the name of Furnival as the note was delivered. Then he watched Mr. Mason as he read it and read it again.

"If you please, Sir, I was to wait for an answer," said the girl.

Mr. Mason did not know what answer it would behove him to give. He felt that he was among Philistines while dealing with all these lawyers, and yet he was at a loss in what way to reply to one without leaning upon another. "Look at that," he said, sulkily handing the note to Dockwrath.

"You must see Mr. Furnival, by all means," said Dockwrath. "But——"

"But what?"

"In your place I should not see him in the presence of Mr. Round—unless I was attended by an adviser on whom I could rely." Mr. Mason, having given a few moments' consideration to the matter, sat himself down and wrote a line to Mr. Furnival, saying that he would be in Bedford Row at the appointed time.

"I think you are quite right," said Dockwrath.

"But I shall go alone," said Mr. Mason.

"Oh, very well; you will of course judge for yourself. I cannot say what may be the nature of the communication to be made; but if it be anything touching the

property, you will no doubt jeopardise your own interests by your imprudence."

"Good-morning, Mr. Dockwrath," said Mr. Mason.

"Oh, very well. Good-morning, Sir. You shall hear from me very shortly, Mr. Mason; and I must say that, considering everything, I do not know that I ever came across a gentleman who behaved himself worse in a peculiar position than you have done in yours." And so they parted.

Punctually at eleven o'clock on the following day Mr. Mason was in Bedford Row. "Mr. Furnival is with Mr. Round," said the clerk, "and will see you in two minutes." Then he was shown into the dingy office waiting-room, where he sat with his hat in his hand, for rather more than two minutes.

At that moment Mr. Round was describing to Mr. Furnival the manner in which he had been visited some weeks since by Sir Peregrine Orme. "Of course, Mr. Furnival, I knew which way the wind blew when I heard that."

"She must have told him everything."

"No doubt, no doubt. At any rate, he knew it all."

"And what did you say to him?"

"I promised to hold my tongue;—and I kept my promise. Mat. knows nothing about it to this day."

The whole history thus became gradually clear to Mr. Furnival's mind, and he could understand in what manner that marriage had been avoided. Mr. Round also understood it, and the two lawyers confessed together, that though the woman had deserved the punishment which had come upon her, her character was one which might have graced a better destiny. "And now, I suppose, my fortunate client may come in," said

Mr. Round. Whereupon the fortunate client was released from his captivity, and brought into the sitting-room of the senior partner.

"Mr. Mason, Mr. Furnival," said the attorney, as soon as he had shaken hands with his client. "You know each other very well by name, gentlemen."

Mr. Mason was very stiff in his bearing and demeanour, but remarked that he had heard of Mr. Furnival before.

"All the world has heard of him," said Mr. Round. "He hasn't hid his light under a bushel." Whereupon Mr. Mason bowed, not quite understanding what was said to him.

"Mr. Mason," began the barrister, "I have a communication to make to you, very singular in its nature, and of great importance. It is one which I believe you will regard as being of considerable importance to yourself, and which is of still higher moment to my—my friend, Lady Mason."

"Lady Mason, Sir—" began the other; but Mr. Furnival stopped him.

"Allow me to interrupt you, Mr. Mason. I think it will be better that you should hear me before you commit yourself to any expression as to your relative."

"She is no relative of mine."

"But her son is. However—if you will allow me, I will go on. Having this communication to make, I thought it expedient for your own sake that it should be done in the presence of your own legal adviser and friend."

"Umph!" grunted the disappointed litigant.

"I have already explained to Mr. Round that which I am about to explain to you, and he was good enough to

express himself as satisfied with the step which I am taking."

"Quite so, Mr. Mason. Mr. Furnival is behaving, and I believe has behaved throughout, in a manner becoming the very high position which he holds in his profession."

"I suppose he has done his best on his side," said Mason.

"Undoubtedly I have—as I should have done on yours, had it so chanced that I had been honoured by holding a brief from your attorneys. But the communication which I am going to make now I make not as a lawyer but as a friend. Mr. Mason, my client Lady Mason, and her son Lucius Mason, are prepared to make over to you the full possession of the estate which they have held under the name of Orley Farm."

The tidings, as so given, were far from conveying to the sense of the hearer the full information which they bore. He heard the words, and at the moment he conceived that Orley Farm was intended to come into his hands by some process to which it was thought desirable that he should be brought to agree. He was to be induced to buy it, or to be bought over from further opposition by some concession of an indefinitely future title. But that the estate was to become his at once, without purchase, and by the mere free-will of his hated relatives, was an idea that he did not realise.

"Mr. Furnival," he said, "what future steps I shall take I do not yet know. That I have been robbed of my property I am as firmly convinced now as ever. But I tell you fairly, and I tell Mr. Round so too, that I will have no dealings with that woman."

"Your father's widow, Sir," said Mr. Furnival, "is an unhappy lady who is now doing her best to atone for

the only fault of which I believe her to have been guilty. If you were not unreasonable as well as angry, you would understand that the proposition which I am now making to you is one which should force you to forgive any injury which she may hitherto have done to you. Your half-brother Lucius Mason has instructed me to make over to you the possession of Orley Farm." These last words Mr. Furnival uttered very slowly, fixing his keen grey eyes full upon the face of Joseph Mason as he did so, and then turning round to the attorney he said, "I presume your client will understand me now."

"The estate is yours, Mr. Mason," said Round. "You have nothing to do but to take possession of it."

"What do you mean?" said Mason, turning round upon Furnival.

"Exactly what I say. Your half-brother Lucius surrenders to you the estate."

"Without payment?"

"Yes; without payment. On his doing so you will of course absolve him from all liability on account of the proceeds of the property while in his hands."

"That will be a matter of course," said Mr. Round.

"Then she has robbed me," said Mason, jumping up to his feet. "By —, the will was forged after all."

"Mr. Mason," said Mr. Round, "if you have a spark of generosity in you, you will accept the offer made to you without asking any question. By no such questioning can you do yourself any good—nor can you do that poor lady any harm."

"I knew it was so," he said loudly, and as he spoke he twice walked the length of the room. "I knew it was so;—twenty years ago I said the same. She forged

the will. I ask you, as my lawyer, Mr. Round,—did she not forge the will herself?"

"I shall answer no such question, Mr. Mason."

"Then by Heavens I'll expose you. If I spend the whole value of the estate in doing it I'll expose you, and have her punished yet. The slippery villain! For twenty years she has robbed me."

"Mr. Mason, you are forgetting yourself in your passion," said Mr. Furnival. "What you have to look for now is the recovery of the property." But here Mr. Furnival showed that he had not made himself master of Joseph Mason's character.

"No," shouted the angry man—"no, by Heaven. What I have first to look to is her punishment, and that of those who have assisted her. I knew she had done it—and Dockwrath knew it. Had I trusted him, she would now have been in gaol."

Mr. Furnival and Mr. Round were both desirous of having the matter quietly arranged, and with this view were willing to put up with much. The man had been ill-used. When he declared for the fortieth time that he had been robbed for twenty years they could not deny it. When with horrid oaths he swore that that will had been a forgery, they could not contradict him. When he reviled the laws of his country, which had done so much to facilitate the escape of a criminal, they had no arguments to prove that he was wrong. They bore with him in his rage, hoping that a sense of his own self-interest might induce him to listen to reason. But it was all in vain. The property was sweet, but that sweetness was tasteless when compared to the sweet-ness of revenge.

"Nothing shall make me tamper with justice;—nothing," said he.

"But even if it were as you say, you cannot do anything to her," said Round.

"I'll try," said Mason. "You have been my attorney, and what you know in the matter you are bound to tell. And I'll make you tell, Sir."

"Upon my word," said Round, "this is beyond bearing. Mr. Mason I must trouble you to walk out of my office." And then he rang the bell. "Tell Mr. Mat. I want to see him." But before that younger partner had joined his father Joseph Mason had gone. "Mat," said the old man, "I don't interfere with you in many things, but on this I must insist. As long as my name is in the firm Mr. Joseph Mason of Groby shall not be among our customers."

"The man's a fool," said Mr. Furnival. "The end of all that will be that two years will go by before he gets his property; and in the meantime, the house and all about it will go to ruin."

In these days there was a delightful family concord between Mr. Furnival and his wife, and perhaps we may be allowed to hope that the peace was permanent. Martha Biggs had not been in Harley Street since we last saw her there, and was now walking round Red Lion Square by the hour with some kindred spirit, complaining bitterly of the return which had been made for her friendship. "What I endured and what I was prepared to endure for that woman, no breathing creature can ever know," said Martha Biggs, to that other Martha; "and now——"

"I suppose the fact is he don't like to see you there," said the other.

"And is that a reason?" said our Martha. "Had I been in her place I would not have put my foot in his house again till I was assured that my friend

should be as welcome there as myself. But then, perhaps, my ideas of friendship may be called romantic.

But though there were heart-burnings and war in Red Lion Square, there was sweet peace in Harley Street. Mrs. Furnival had learned that beyond all doubt Lady Mason was an unfortunate woman on whose behalf her husband was using his best energies as a lawyer; and though rumours had begun to reach her that were very injurious to the lady's character, she did not on that account feel animosity against her. Had Lady Mason been guilty of all the sins in the calendar except one, Mrs. Furnival could find it within her heart to forgive her.

But Sophia was now more interested about Lady Mason than was her mother, and during those days of the trial was much more eager to learn the news as it became known. She had said nothing to her mother about Lucius, nor had she said anything as to Augustus Staveley. Miss Furnival was a lady who on such subjects did not want the assistance of a mother's counsel. Then, early on the morning that followed the trial, they heard the verdict and knew that Lady Mason was free.

"I am so glad," said Mrs. Furnival; "and I am sure it was your papa's doings."

"But we will hope that she was really innocent," said Sophia.

"Oh, yes; of course; and so I suppose she was. I am sure I hope so. But, nevertheless, we all know that it was going very much against her."

"I believe papa never thought she was guilty for a moment."

"I don't know, my dear; your papa never talks of the clients for whom he is engaged. But what a thing

it is for Lucius! He would have lost every acre of the property."

"Yes; it's a great thing for him, certainly." And then she began to consider whether the standing held by Lucius Mason in the world was not even yet somewhat precarious.

It was on the same day—in the evening—that she received her lover's letter. She was alone when she read it, and she made herself quite master of its contents before she sat herself to think in what way it would be expedient that she should act. "I am bound to relinquish to my brother-in-law my title to Orley Farm." Why should he be so bound, unless? And then she also came to that conclusion which Mr. Round had reached, and which Joseph Mason had reached, when they heard that the property was to be given up. "Yes, Sophia, I am a beggar," the letter went on to say. She was very sorry, deeply sorry;—so, at least, she said to herself. As she sat there alone, she took out her handkerchief and pressed it to her eyes. Then, having restored it to her pocket, after moderate use, she refolded her letter, and put that into the same receptacle.

"Papa," said she, that evening, "what will Mr. Lucius Mason do now? will he remain at Orley Farm?"

"No, my dear. He will leave Orley Farm, and, I think, will go abroad with his mother."

"And who will have Orley Farm?"

"His brother Joseph, I believe."

"And what will Lucius have?"

"I cannot say. I do not know that he will have anything. His mother has an income of her own, and he, I suppose, will go into some profession."

"Oh, indeed. Is not that very sad for him poor fellow?" In answer to which her father made no remark.

That night, in her own room, she answered her lover's letter, and her answer was as follows:—

" Harley Street, March. 18.—

"**MY DEAR MR. MASON,**

"I need hardly tell you that I was grieved to the heart by the tidings conveyed in your letter. I will not ask you for that secret which you withhold from me, feeling that I have no title to inquire into it; nor will I attempt to guess at the cause which induces you to give up to your brother the property which you were always taught to regard as your own. That you are actuated by noble motives I am sure; and you may be sure of this, that I shall respect you quite as highly in your adversity as I have ever done in your prosperity. That you will make your way in the world I shall never doubt; and it may be that the labour which you will now encounter will raise you to higher standing than any you could have achieved, had the property remained in your possession.

"I think you are right in saying, with reference to our mutual regard for each other, that neither should be held as having any claim upon the other. Under present circumstances, any such claim would be very silly. Nothing would hamper you in your future career so much as a long marriage engagement; and for myself, I am aware that the sorrow and solicitude thence arising would be more than I could support. Apart from this, also, I feel certain that I should never obtain my father's sanction for such an engagement, nor could I make it unless he sanctioned it. I feel

so satisfied that you will see the truth of this, that I need not trouble you, and harass my own heart by pursuing the subject any further.

" My feelings of friendship for you—of affectionate friendship—will be as true as ever. I shall look to your future career with great hope, and shall hear of your success with the utmost satisfaction. And I trust that the time may come, at no very distant date, when we may all welcome your return to London, and show you that our regard for you has never been diminished.

" May God bless and preserve you in the trials which are before you, and carry you through them with honour and safety. Wherever you may be I shall watch for tidings of you with anxiety, and always hear them with gratification. I need hardly bid you remember that you have no more affectionate friend

" Than yours always most sincerely,

"SOPHIA FURNIVAL.

" P.S.—I believe that a meeting between us at the present moment would only cause pain to both of us. It might drive you to speak of things which should be wrapped in silence. At any rate, I am sure that you will not press it on me."

Lucius, when he received this letter, was living with his mother in lodgings near Finsbury Circus, and the letter had been redirected from Hamworth to a post-office in that neighbourhood. It was his intention to take his mother with him to a small town on one of the rivers that feed the Rhine, and there remain hidden till he could find some means by which he might earn his bread. He was sitting with her in the evening, with two dull tallow candles on the table between them, when his messenger brought the letter to him.

He read it in silence very deliberately, then crushed it in his hand, and threw it from him with violence into the fire.

"I hope there is nothing further to distress you, Lucius," said his mother, looking up into his face as though she were imploring his confidence.

"No nothing; nothing that matters. It is an affair quite private to myself."

Sir Peregrine had spoken with great truth when he declared that Lucius Mason was able to bear adversity. This last blow had now come upon him, but he made no wailings as to his misery, nor did he say a word further on the subject. His mother watched the paper as the flame caught it and reduced it to an ash; but she asked no further question. She knew that her position with him did not permit of her asking, or even hoping, for his confidence.

"I had no right to expect it would be otherwise," he said to himself. But even to himself he spoke no word of reproach against Miss Furnival. He had realised the circumstances by which he was surrounded, and had made up his mind to bear their result.

As for Miss Furnival, we may as well declare here that she did not become Mrs. Staveley. Our old friend Augustus conceived that he had received a sufficient answer on the occasion of his last visit to Harley Street, and did not repeat it immediately. Such little scenes as that which took place there had not been uncommon in his life; and when in after months he looked back upon this affair, he counted it up as one of those miraculous escapes which had marked his career.

CHAPTER XXV

FAREWELL

"THAT letter you got this morning, my dear, was it not from Lady Mason?"

"It was from Lady Mason, father; they go on Thursday."

"On Thursday; so soon as that." And then Sir Peregrine, who had asked the question, remained silent for a while. The letter, according to the family custom, had been handed to Mrs. Orme over the breakfast-table; but he had made no remark respecting it till they were alone together and free from the servants. It had been a farewell letter, full of love and gratitude, and full also of repentance. Lady Mason had now been for three weeks in London, and once during that time Mrs. Orme had gone up to visit her. She had then remained with her friend for hours, greatly to Lady Mason's comfort, and now this letter had come, bringing a last adieu.

"You may read it, Sir, if you like," said Mrs. Orme, handing him the letter. It was evident, by his face, that he was gratified by the privilege; and he read it, not once only, but over and over again. As he did so, he placed himself in the shade, and sat with his back to Mrs. Orme; but nevertheless she could see that from time to time he rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand, and gradually raised his handkerchief to his face.

"Thank you, dearest," he said, as he gave the letter back to her.

"I think that we may forgive her now, even all that she has done," said Mrs. Orme.

"Yes—yes—yes," he answered. "For myself, I forgave her from the first."

"I know you did. But as regards the property,—it has been given up now." And then again they were silent.

"Edith," he said, after a while, "I have forgiven her altogether. To me she is the same as though she had never done that deed. Are we not all sinners?"

"Surely, father."

"And can I say because she did one startling thing that the total of her sin is greater than mine? Was I ever tempted as she was tempted? Was my youth made dangerous for me as was hers? And then she did nothing for herself; she did it all for another. We may think of that now."

"I have thought of it always."

"It did not make the sin the less; but among her fellow-mortals—" And then he stopped himself, wanting words to express his meaning. The sin, till it was repented, was damning; but now that it was repented, he could almost love the sinner for the sin.

"Edith," he said, again. And he looked at her so wishfully! She knew well what was the working of his heart, and she knew also that she did not dare to encourage him.

"I trust," said Mrs. Orme, "that she will bear her present lot for a few years; and then, perhaps—"

"Ah! then I shall be in my grave. A few months will do that."

"Oh, Sir!"

"Why should I not save her from such a life as that?"

"From that which she had most to fear she has been saved."

"Had she not so chosen it herself, she could now have demanded from me a home. Why should I not give it to her now?"

"A home here, Sir?"

"Yes; why not? But I know what you would say. It would be wrong,—to you and Perry."

"It would be wrong to yourself, Sir. Think of it, father. It is the fact that she did that thing. We may forgive her, but others will not do so on that account. It would not be right that you should bring her here."

Sir Peregrine knew that it would not be right. Though he was old and weak in body, and infirm in purpose, his judgment had not altogether left him. He was well aware that he would offend all social laws if he were to do that which he contemplated, and ask the world around him to respect as Lady Orme—as his wife, the woman who had so deeply disgraced herself.

But yet he could hardly bring himself to confess that it was impossible. He was as a child who knows that a coveted treasure is beyond his reach, but still covets it, still longs for it, hoping against hope that it may yet be his own. It seemed to him that he might yet regain his old vitality if he could wind his arm once more about her waist, and press her to his side, and call her his own. It would be so sweet to forgive her; to make her sure that she was absolutely forgiven; to teach her that there was one at least who would not bring up against her her past sin, even in

his memory. As for his grandson, the property should be abandoned to him altogether. 'Twas thus he argued with himself; but yet, as he argued, he knew that it could not be so.

"I was harsh to her when she told me," he said, after another pause—"cruelly harsh."

"She does not think so."

"No. If I had spurned her from me with my foot, she would not have thought so. She had condemned herself, and therefore I should have spared her."

"But you did spare her. I am sure she feels that from the first to the last your conduct to her has been more than kind."

"And I owed her more than kindness, for I loved her;—yes, I loved her, and I do love her. Though I am a feeble old man, tottering to my grave, yet I love her—love her as that boy loves the fair girl for whom he longs. He will overcome it, and forget it, and some other one as fair will take her place. But for me it is all over."

What could she say to him? In truth, it was all over,—such love at least as that of which his old heart was dreaming in its dotage. There is no Medea's caldron from which our limbs can come out young and fresh; and it were well that the heart should grow old as does the body.

"It is not all over while we are with you," she said, caressing him. But she knew that what she said was a subterfuge.

"Yes, yes; I have you, dearest," he answered. But he also knew that that pretence at comfort was false and hollow.

"And she starts on Thursday," he said; "on next Thursday."

"Yes, on Thursday. It will be much better for her to be away from London. While she is there she never ventures even into the street."

"Edith, I shall see her before she goes."

"Will that be wise, Sir?"

"Perhaps not. It may be foolish,—very foolish; but still I shall see her. I think you forget, Edith, that I have never yet bidden her farewell, I have not spoken to her since that day when she behaved so generously."

"I do not think that she expects it, father."

"No; she expects nothing for herself. Had it been in her nature to expect such a visit, I should not have been anxious to make it. I will go to-morrow. She is always at home you say?"

"Yes, she is always at home."

"And, Lucius——"

"You will not find him there in the daytime."

"I shall go to-morrow, dear. You need not tell Peregrine."

Mrs. Orme still thought that he was wrong, but she had nothing further to say. She could not hinder his going, and therefore, with his permission she wrote a line to Lady Mason, telling her of his purpose. And then, with all the care in her power, and with infinite softness of manner, she warned him against the danger which she so much feared. What might be the result, if, overcome by tenderness, he should again ask Lady Mason to become his wife? Mrs. Orme firmly believed that Lady Mason would again refuse; but, nevertheless, there would be danger.

"No," said he, "I will not do that. When I have said so you may accept my word."

Then she hastened to apologise to him, but he assured

her with a kiss that he was in nowise angry with her. He held by his purpose and on the following day he went up to London. There was nothing said on the matter at breakfast, nor did she make any further endeavour to dissuade him. He was infirm, but still she knew that the actual fatigue would not be of a nature to injure him. Indeed her fear respecting him was rather in regard to his staying at home than to his going abroad. It would have been well for him could he have been induced to think himself fit for more active movement.

Lady Mason was alone when he reached the dingy little room near Finsbury Circus, and received him standing. She was the first to speak, and this she did before she had even touched his hand. She stood to meet him, with her eyes turned to the ground, and her hands tightly folded together before her. "Sir Peregrine," she said, "I did not expect from you this mark of your—kindness."

"Of my esteem and affection, Lady Mason," he said. "We have known each other too well to allow of our parting without a word. I am an old man, and it will probably be for ever."

Then she gave him her hand, and gradually lifted her eyes to his face. "Yes," she said; "it will be for ever. There will be no coming back for me."

"Nay, nay; we will not say that. That's as may be hereafter. But it will not be at once. It had better not be quite at once. Edith tells me that you go on Thursday."

"Yes, Sir; we go on Thursday."

She had still allowed her hand to remain in his, but now she withdrew it, and asked him to sit down. "Lucius is not here," she said. "He never remains

at home after breakfast. He has much to settle as to our journey; and then he has lawyers to see."

Sir Peregrine had not at all wished to see Lucius Mason, but he did not say so. "You will give him my regards," he said, "and tell him that I trust that he may prosper."

"Thank you. I will do so. It is very kind of you to think of him."

"I have always thought highly of him as an excellent young man."

"And he is excellent. Where is there any one who could suffer without a word as he suffers? No complaint ever comes from him; and yet—I have ruined him."

"No, no. He has his youth, his intellect, and his education. If such a one as he cannot earn his bread in the world—ay, and more than his bread—who can do so? Nothing ruins a young man but ignorance, idleness, and depravity."

"Nothing;—unless those of whom he should be proud disgrace him before the eyes of the world. Sir Peregrine, I sometimes wonder at my own calmness. I wonder that I can live. But, believe me, that never for a moment do I forget what I have done. I would have poured out for him my blood like water, if it would have served him; but instead of that I have given him cause to curse me till the day of his death. Though I still live, and eat, and sleep, I think of that always. The remembrance is never away from me. They bid those who repent put on sackcloth, and cover themselves with ashes. That is my sackcloth, and it is very sore. Those thoughts are ashes to me, and they are very bitter between my teeth."

He did not know with what words to comfort her.

It all was as she said, and he could not bid her even try to free herself from that sackcloth and from those ashes. It must be so. Were it not so with her, she would not have been in any degree worthy of that love which he felt for her. "God tempers the wind to the shorn lamb," he said.

"Yes," she said, "for the shorn lamb—" And then she was silent again. But could that bitter, biting wind be tempered for the she-wolf who, in the dead of night, had broken into the fold, and with prowling steps and cunning clutch had stolen the fodder from the sheep? That was the question as it presented itself to her; but she sat silent, and refrained from putting it into words. She sat silent, but he read her heart. "For the shorn lamb—" she had said, and he had known her thoughts, as they followed, quick, one upon another, through her mind. "Mary," he said, seating himself now close beside her on the sofa, "if his heart be as true to you as mine, he will never remember these things against you."

"It is my memory, not his, that is my punishment," she said.

Why could he not take her home with him, and comfort her, and heal that festering wound, and stop that ever-running gush of her heart's blood? But he could not. He had pledged his word and pawned his honour. All the comfort that could be his to bestow must be given in those few minutes that remained to him in that room. And it must be given, too, without falsehood.

He could not bring himself to tell her that the sackcloth need not be sore to her poor lacerated body, nor the ashes bitter between her teeth. He could not tell her that the cup of which it was hers to drink

might yet be pleasant to the taste, and cool to the lips! What could he tell her? Of the only source of true comfort others, he knew, had spoken—others who had not spoken in vain. He could not now take up that matter, and press it on her with available strength. For him there was but one thing to say. He had forgiven her; he still loved her; he would have cherished her in his bosom had it been possible. He was a weak, old, foolish man; and there was nothing of which he could speak but of his own heart.

"Mary," he said, again taking her hand, "I wish—I wish that I could comfort you."

"And yet on you also have I brought trouble, and misery—and—all but disgrace!"

"No, my love, no; neither misery nor disgrace—except this misery, that I shall be no longer near to you. Yes, I will tell you all now. Were I alone in the world, I would still beg you to go back with me."

"It cannot be; it could not possibly be so."

"No; for I am not alone. She who loves you so well, has told me so. It must not be. But that is the source of my misery. I have learned to love you too well, and don't know how to part with you. If this had not been so, I would have done all that an old man might to comfort you."

"But it has been so," she said. "I cannot wash out the past. Knowing what I did of myself, Sir Peregrine, I should never have put my foot over your threshold."

"I wish I might hear its step again upon my floors. I wish I might hear that light step once again."

"Never, Sir Peregrine. No one again ever shall rejoice to hear either my step or my voice, or to see my form, or to grasp my hand. The world is over for

me, and may God soon grant me relief from my sorrow.
But to you—in return for your goodness—”

“For my love.”

“In return for your love, what am I to say? I could have loved you with all my heart had it been so permitted. Nay, I did do so. Had that dream been carried out, I should not have sworn falsely when I gave you my hand. I bade her tell you so from me, when I parted with her.”

“She did tell me.”

“I have known but little love. He—Sir Joseph—was my master rather than my husband. He was a good master, and I served him truly—except in that one thing. But I never loved him. But I am wrong to talk of this and I will not talk of it longer. May God bless you, Sir Peregrine! It will be well for both of us now that you should leave me.”

“May God bless you, Mary, and preserve you, and give back to you the comforts of a quiet spirit, and a heart at rest! Till you hear that I am under the ground you will know that there is one living who loves you well.” Then he took her in his arms twice kissed her on the forehead, and left the room without further speech.

Lady Mason, as soon as she was alone, sat herself down, and her thoughts ran back over the whole course of her life. Early in her days when the world was yet beginning to her, she had done one evil deed, and from that time up to those days of her trial she had been the victim of one incessant struggle to appear before the world as though that deed had not been done—to appear innocent of it before the world, but, beyond all things, innocent of it before her son. For twenty years she had striven with a labour that had been all

but unendurable; and now she had failed, and every one knew her for what she was. Such had been her life; and then she thought of the life which might have been hers. In her earlier days she had known what it was to be poor, and had seen and heard those battles after money which harden our hearts, and quench the poetry of our natures. But it had not been altogether so with her. Had things gone differently with her it might afterwards have been said that she had gone through the fire unscathed. But the beast had set his foot upon her, and when the temptation came it was too much for her. Not for herself would she have sinned, or have robbed that old man, who had been to her a kind master. But when a child was born to her, her eyes were blind, and she could not see that wealth ill-gotten for her child would be as sure a curse as wealth ill-gotten for herself. She remembered Rebekah, and with the cunning of a second Rebekah she filched a world's blessing for her baby. Now she thought of all this as pictures of that life which might have been hers passed before her mind's eye.

And they were pleasant pictures, had they not burnt into her very soul as she looked at them. How sweet had been that drawing-room at The Cleeve, as she sat there in luxurious quiet with her new friend! How sweet had been that friendship with a woman pure in all her thoughts, graceful to the eye, and delicate in all her ways! She knew now, as she thought of this, that to her had been given the power to appreciate such delights as these. How full of charm to her would have been that life, in which there had been so much of true, innocent affection;—had the load ever been absent from her shoulders! And then she thought of Sir Peregrine, with his pleasant, ancient manner, and

truth of heart, and told herself that she could have been happy with the love of even so old a man as that—had that burden been away from her! But the burden had never been away—never could be away. Then she thought once more of her stern but just son, and as she bowed her head and kissed the rod, she prayed that her release might come to her soon.

And now we will say farewell to her, and as we do so the chief interest of our tale will end. I may, perhaps, be thought to owe an apology to my readers in that I have asked their sympathy for a woman who had so sinned as to have placed her beyond the general sympathy of the world at large. If so, I tender my apology, and perhaps feel that I should confess a fault. But as I have told her story that sympathy has grown upon myself till I have learned to forgive her, and to feel that I too could have regarded her as a friend. Of her future life I will not venture to say anything. But no lesson is truer than that which teaches us to believe that God does temper the wind to the shorn lamb. To how many has it not seemed, at some one period of their lives, that all was over for them, and that to them in their afflictions there was nothing left but to die! And yet they have lived to laugh again, to feel that the air was warm and the earth fair, and that God in giving them ever-springing hope had given everything. How many a sun may seem to set on an endless night, and yet rising again on some morrow—

“He tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore,
Flames in the forehead of the morning sky!”

For Lady Mason let us hope that the day will come in which she also may once again trick her beams in

some modest, unassuming way, and that for her the morning may even yet be sweet with a glad warmth. For us, here in these pages, it must be sufficient to say this last kindly farewell.

As to Lucius Mason and the arrangement of his affairs with his step-brother, a few concluding words will suffice. When Joseph Mason left the office of Messrs. Round and Crook he would gladly have sacrificed all hope of any eventual pecuniary benefit from the possession of Orley Farm could he by doing so have secured the condign punishment of her who had so long kept him out of his inheritance. But he soon found that he had no means of doing this. In the first place he did not know where to turn for advice. He had quarrelled absolutely with Dockwrath, and though he now greatly distrusted the Rounds, he by no means put implicit trust in him of Hamworth. Of the Rounds he suspected that they were engaged to serve his enemy, of Dockwrath he felt sure that he was anxious only to serve himself. Under these circumstances he was driven into the arms of a third attorney, and learned from him, after a delay that cut him to the soul, that he could take no further criminal proceeding against Lady Mason. It would be impossible to have her even indicted for the forgery—seeing that two juries, at the interval of twenty years, had virtually acquitted her—unless new evidence which should be absolute and positive in its kind should be forthcoming. But there was no new evidence of any kind. The offer made to surrender the property was no evidence for a jury whatever it might be in the mind of the world at large.

"And what am I to do?" asked Mason.

"Take the goods the gods provide you," said the

attorney. "Accept the offer which your half-brother has very generously made you."

"Generously!" shouted Mason of Groby.

"Well, on his part it is generous. It is quite within his power to keep it; and were he to do so no one would say he was wrong. Why should he judge his mother?"

Then Mr. Joseph Mason went to another attorney; but it was of no avail. The time was passing away, and he learned that Lady Mason and Lucius had actually started for Germany. In his agony for revenge he had endeavoured to obtain some legal order that should prevent her departure;— "ne exeat regno," as he repeated over and over again to his advisers learned in the law. But it was of no avail. Lady Mason had been tried and acquitted, and no judge would interfere.

"We should soon have her back again, you know, if we had evidence of forgery," said the last attorney.

"Then by —! we will have her back again," said Mason.

But the threat was vain; nor could he get any one even to promise him that she could be prosecuted and convicted. And by degrees the desire for vengeance slackened as the desire for gain resumed its sway. Many men have threatened to spend a property upon a lawsuit who have afterwards felt grateful that their threats were made abortive. And so it was with Mr. Mason. After remaining in town over a month he took the advice of the first of those new lawyers and allowed that gentleman to put himself in communication with Mr. Furnival. The result was that by the end of six months he again came out of Yorkshire to take upon himself the duties and privileges of the owner of Orley Farm.

And then came his great fight with Dockwrath,

which in the end ruined the Hamworth attorney, and cost Mr. Mason more money than ever he liked to confess. Dockwrath claimed to be put in possession of Orley Farm at an exceedingly moderate rent, as to the terms of which he was prepared to prove that Mr. Mason had already entered into a contract with him. Mr. Mason utterly ignored such contract, and contended that the words contained in a certain note produced by Dockwrath amounted only to a proposition to let him the land in the event of certain circumstances and results—which circumstances and results never took place.

This lawsuit Mr. Joseph Mason did win, and Mr. Samuel Dockwrath was, as I have said, ruined. What the attorney did to make it necessary that he should leave Hamworth I do not know; but Miriam, his wife, is now the mistress of that lodging-house to which her own mahogany furniture was so ruthlessly removed.

CHAPTER XXVI

SHOWING HOW AFFAIRS SETTLED THEMSELVES AT NONINGSBY

WE must now go back to Noningsby for one concluding chapter, and then our work will be completed.

" You are not to go away from Noningsby when the trial is over, you know. Mamma said that I had better tell you so." It was thus that Madeline had spoken to Felix Graham as he was going out to the judge's carriage on the last morning of the celebrated great Orley Farm case, and as she did so she twisted one of her little fingers into one of his button-holes. This she did with a prettiness of familiarity, and the assumption of a right to give him orders and hold him to obedience, which was almost intoxicating in its sweetness. And why should she not be familiar with him? Why should she not hold him to obedience by his button-hole? Was he not her own? Had she not chosen him and taken him up to the exclusion of all other such choosings and takings?

" I shall not go till you send me," he said, putting up his hand as though to protect his coat, and just touching her fingers as he did so.

" Mamma says it will be stupid for you in the mornings, but it will not be worse for you than for Augustus. He stays till after Easter."

" And I shall stay till after Whitsuntide unless I am turned out."

"Oh! but you will be turned out. I am not going to make myself answerable for any improper amount of idleness. Papa says you have got all the law courts to reform."

"There must be a double Hercules for such a set of stables as that," said Felix; and then with the slight ceremony to which I have before adverted he took his leave for the day.

"I suppose there will be no use in delaying it," said Lady Staveley on the same morning as she and her daughter sat together in the drawing-room. They had already been talking over the new engagement by the hour, together; but that is a subject on which mothers with marriageable daughters never grow tired, as all mothers and marriageable daughters know full well.

"Oh! mamma, I think it must be delayed."

"But why, my love? Mr. Graham has not said so?"

"You must call him Felix, mamma. I'm sure it's a nice name."

"Very well, my dear, I will."

"No; he has said nothing yet. But of course he means to wait till,—till it will be prudent."

"Men never care for prudence of that kind when they are really in love;—and I'm sure he is."

"Is he, mamma?"

"He will marry on anything or nothing. And if you speak to him he tells you of how the young ravens were fed. But he always forgets that he's not a young raven himself."

"Now you're only joking, mamma."

"Indeed I'm quite in earnest. But I think your papa means to make up an income for you,—only you must not expect to be rich."

"I do not want to be rich. I never did."

"I suppose you will live in London, and then you can come down here when the courts are up. I do hope he won't ever want to take a situation in the colonies."

"Who, Felix? Why should he go to the colonies?"

"They always do,—the clever young barristers who marry before they have made their way. That would be very dreadful. I really think it would kill me."

"Oh! mamma, he sha'n't go to any colony."

"To be sure there are the county courts now, and they are better. I suppose you wouldn't like to live at Leeds or Merthyr-Tydvil?"

"Of course I shall live wherever he goes; but I don't know why you should send him to Merthyr-Tydvil."

"Those are the sort of places they do go to. There is young Mrs. Bright Newdegate,—she had to go to South Shields, and her babies are all dreadfully delicate. She lost two, you know. I do think the Lord Chancellor ought to think about that. Reigate, or Maidstone, of anywhere about Great Marlow would not be so bad." And in this way they discussed the coming event and the happy future, while Felix himself was listening to the judge's charge and thinking of his client's guilt.

Then there were two or three days passed at Noningsby of almost unalloyed sweetness. It seemed that they had all agreed that Prudence should go by the board, and that Love with sweet promises and hopes bright as young trees in spring, should have it all her own way. Judge Staveley was a man who on such an occasion—knowing with whom he had to deal—could allow ordinary prudence to go by the board. There are men, and excellent men too, from whose minds the

cares of life never banish themselves, who never seem to remember that provision is made for the young ravens. They toil and spin always, thinking sternly of the worst and rarely hoping for the best. They are ever making provision for rainy days, as though there were to be no more sunshine. So anxious are they for their children that they take no pleasure in them, and their fear is constant that the earth will cease to produce her fruits. Of such was not the judge. "Dulce est desipere in locis," he would say, "and let the opportunities be frequent and the occasions many." Such a love-making opportunity as this surely should be one.

So Graham wandered about through the dry March winds with his future bride by his side, and never knew that the blasts came from the pernicious east. And she would lean on his arm as though he had been the friend of her earliest years, listening to and trusting him in all things. That little finger, as they stood together, would get up to his button-hole, and her bright, frank eyes would settle themselves on his, and then her hand would press closely upon his arm, and he knew that she was neither ashamed nor afraid of her love. Her love to her was the same as her religion. When it was once acknowledged by her to be a thing good and trustworthy, all the world might know it. Was it not a glory to her that he had chosen her, and why should she conceal her glory? Had it been that some richer, greater man had won her love,—some one whose titles were known and high places in the world approved,—it may well be that then she would have been less free with him.

"Papa would like it best if you would give up your writing, and think of nothing but the law," she said to

him. In answer to which he told her, with many compliments to the special fox in question, that story of the fox who had lost his tail and thought it well that other foxes should dress themselves as he was dressed.

"At any rate papa looks very well without his tail," said Madeline, with somewhat of a daughter's pride. "But you shall wear yours all the same if you like it," she added with much of a young maiden's love.

As they were thus walking near the house on the afternoon of the third or fourth day after the trial, one of the maids came to them and told Madeline that a gentleman was in the house who wished to see her.

"A gentleman!" said Madeline.

"Mr. Orme, Miss. My lady told me to ask you up if you were anywhere near."

"I suppose I must go," said Madeline, from whom all her pretty freedom of manner and light happiness of face departed on the moment. She had told Felix everything as to poor Peregrine in return for that story of his respecting Mary Snow. To her it seemed as though that had made things equal between them,—for she was too generous to observe that though she had given nothing to her other lover, Felix had been engaged for many months to marry his other love. But girls, I think, have no objection to this. They do not desire first fruits, or even early fruits, as men do. Indeed, I am not sure whether experience on the part of a gentleman in his use of his heart is not supposed by most young ladies to enhance the value of the article. Madeline was not in the least jealous of Mary Snow; but with great good-nature promised to look after her, and patronise her when she should have become Mrs. Albert Fitzallen. "But I don't think I should like that Mrs. Thomas," she said.

"You would have mended the stockings for her all the same."

"Oh yes, I would have done that;—and so did Miss Snow. But I would have kept my box locked. She should never have seen my letters."

It was now absolutely necessary that she should return to the house and say to Peregrine Orme what words of comfort might be possible for her. If she could have spoken simply with her heart, she would have said much that was friendly, even though it might not be comfortable. But it was necessary that she should express herself in words, and she felt that the task was very difficult. "Will you come in?" she said to Felix.

"No, I think not. But he's a splendid fellow, and to me was a staunch friend. If I can catch him as he comes out I will speak to him." And then Madeline, with hesitating steps, with her hat still on her head, and her gloves on her hands, walked through the hall into the drawing-room. There she found her mother seated on the sofa, and Peregrine Orme standing before her. Madeline walked up to him with extended hand and a kindly welcome though she felt that the colour was high in her cheeks. Of course it would be impossible to come out from such an interview as this without having confessed her position, or hearing it confessed by her mother in her presence. That, however, had been already done, and Peregrine knew that the prize was gone.

"How do you do, Miss Staveley?" said he. "As I am going to leave The Cleeve for a long time, I have come over to say good-bye to Lady Staveley—and to you."

"Are you going away, Mr. Orme?"

"Yes, I shall go abroad,—to Central Africa, I think. It seems a wild sort of a place with plenty of animals to kill."

"But isn't it very dangerous?"

"No, I don't think so. The people always come back alive. I've a sort of idea that nothing will kill me. At any rate I couldn't stay here."

"Madeline, dear, I've told Mr. Orme that you have accepted Mr. Graham. With a friend such as he is I know that you will not be anxious to keep this a secret."

"No, mamma."

"I was sure of that; and now that your papa has consented to it, and that is it quite fixed, I am sure that it is better that he should know it. We shall always look upon him as a very dear friend—if he will allow us."

Then it was necessary that Peregrine should speak, which he did as follows, holding Madeline's hand for the first three or four seconds of the time:—"Miss Staveley, I will say this of myself, that if ever a fellow loved a girl truly, I loved you;—and I do so now as well or better than ever. It is no good my pretending to be contented, and all that sort of thing. I am not contented, but very unhappy. I have never wished for but one thing in my life; and for that I would have given all that I have in the world. I know that I cannot have it, and that I am not fit to have it."

"Oh, Mr. Orme, it is not that."

"But it is that. I knew you before Graham did, and loved you quite as soon. I believe—though of course I don't mean to ask any questions—but I believe I told you so before he ever did."

"Marriages they say, are planned in heaven," said Lady Staveley.

"Perhaps they are. I only wish this one had not been planned there. I cannot help it,—I cannot express my satisfaction, though I will heartily wish for your happiness. I knew from the first how it would be, and was always sure that I was a fool to love you. I should have gone away when I first thought of it, for I used to feel that you never cared to speak to me."

"Oh, indeed I did," said poor Madeline.

"No, you did not. And why should you when I had nothing to say for myself? I ought to have fallen in love with some foolish chit with as little wit about her as I have myself."

"I hope you will fall in love with some very nice girl," said Lady Staveley; "and that we shall know her and love her very much."

"Oh, I dare say I shall marry some day. I feel now as though I should like to break my neck, but I don't suppose I shall. Good-bye, Lady Staveley?"

"Good-bye, Mr. Orme; and may God send that you may be happy."

"Good-bye, Madeline. I shall never call you so again,—except to myself. I do wish you may be happy,—I do indeed. As for him,—he has been before me, and taken away all that I wanted to win."

By this time the tears were in his eyes, and his voice was not free from their effect. Of this he was aware, and therefore, pressing her hand, he turned upon his heel and abruptly left the room.

He had been unable to say that he wished also that Felix might be happy; but this omission was forgiven him by both the ladies. Poor Madeline, as he went, muttered a kind farewell, but her tears

had mastered her also, so that she could hardly speak.

He went directly to the stables, there got upon his horse, and then walked slowly down the avenue towards the gate. He had got the better of that tear-compelling softness as soon as he found himself beyond the presence of the girl he loved, and was now stern in his mood, striving to harden his heart. He had confessed himself a fool in comparison with Felix Graham; but yet,—he asked himself,—in spite of that, was it not possible that he would have made her a better husband than the other? It was not to his title or his estate that he trusted as he so thought, but to a feeling that he was more akin to her in circumstances, in ways of life, and in tenderness of heart. As all this was passing through his mind, Felix Graham presented himself to him in the road.

"Orme," said he, "I heard that you were in the house, and have come to shake hands with you. I suppose you have heard what has taken place. Will you not shake hands with me?"

"No," said Peregrine, "I will not."

"I am sorry for that, for we were good friends, and I owe you much for your kindness. It was a fair stand-up fight, and you should not be angry."

"I am angry, and I don't want your friendship. Go and tell her that I say so, if you like."

"No, I will not do that."

"I wish with all my heart that we had both killed ourselves at that bank."

"For shame, Orme, for shame!"

"Very well, Sir; let it be for shame. And then he passed on, meaning to go through the gate, and leaving Graham on the grass by the roadside. But before he

had gone a hundred yards down the road his better feelings came back upon him, and he returned.

"I am unhappy," he said, "and sore at heart. You must not mind what words I spoke just now."

"No, no; I am sure you did not mean them," said Felix, putting his hand on the horse's mane.

"I did mean them then, but I do not mean them now. I won't say anything about wishes. Of course you will be happy with her. Anybody would be happy with her. I suppose you won't die, and give a fellow another chance."

"Not if I can help it," said Graham.

"Well, if you are to live I don't wish you any evil. I do wish you hadn't come to Noningsby, that's all. Good-bye to you." And he held out his hand, which Graham took.

"We shall be good friends yet, for all that is come and gone," said Graham; and then there were no more words between them.

Peregrine did as he said, and went abroad, extending his travels to many wild countries, in which, as he used to say, any one else would have been in danger. No danger ever came to him,—so at least he frequently wrote word to his mother. Gorillas he slew by scores, lions by hundreds, and elephants sufficient for an ivory palace. The skins, and bones, and other trophies, he sent home in various ships; and when he appeared in London as a lion, no man doubted his word. But then he did not write a book, nor even give lectures; nor did he presume to know much about the huge brutes he had slain, except that they were pervious to powder and ball.

Sir Peregrine had endeavoured to keep him at home by giving up the property into his hands; but neither

for grandfather, nor for mother, nor for lands and money would he remain the neighbourhood of Noningsby. "No, mother," he said; "it will be better for me to be away." And away he went.

The old baronet lived to see him return, though with plaintive wail he often declared to his daughter-in-law that this was impossible. He lived, but he never returned to that living life which had been his before he had taken up the battle for Lady Mason. He would sometimes allow Mrs. Orme to drive him about the grounds, but otherwise he remained in the house, sitting solitary over his fire,—with a book, indeed, open before him, but rarely reading. He was waiting patiently, as he said, till death should come to him.

Mrs. Orme kept her promise, and wrote constantly to Lady Mason,—hearing from her as constantly. When Lucius had been six months in Germany, he decided on going to Australia, leaving his mother for the present in the little German town in which they were staying. For her on the whole the change was for the better. As to his success in a thriving colony, there can be but little doubt.

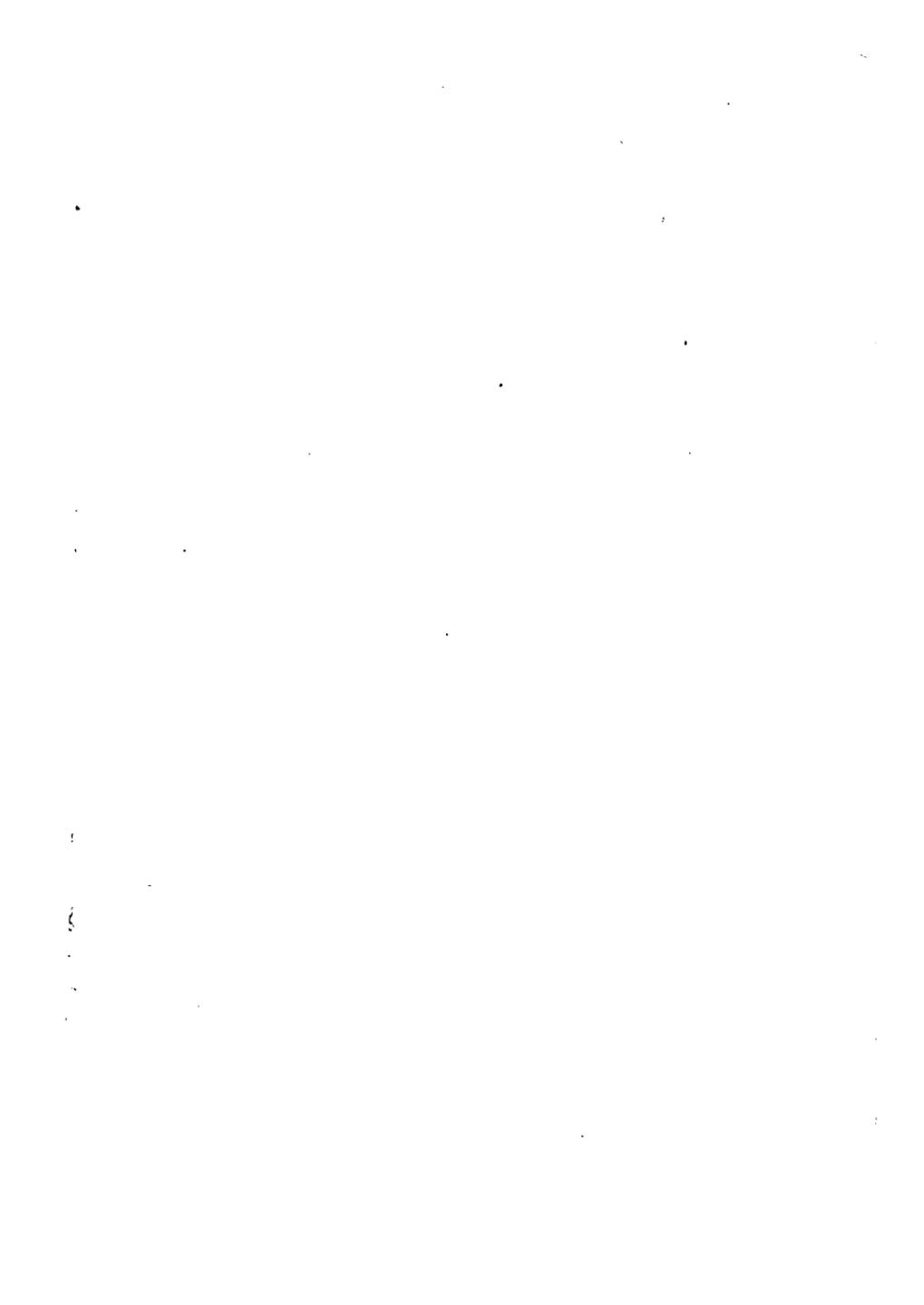
Felix Graham was soon married to Madeline; and as yet I have not heard of any banishment either to Patagonia or to Merthyr-Tydvil.

And now I may say farewell.

THE END







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